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SHAN SHUI

MOUNTAIN AND WATER PAINTING MAGAZINE

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山水

SHAN SHUI

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The Shanshui Magazine editorial and advisory board is composed of artists, scholars, and curators who share a deep commitment to fostering cultural dialogue between China and the world.
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Art is one of the deepest expressions of human thought — a way to communicate ideas, emotions, and visions of the world. Every artist, rooted in their own culture, reflects not only personal experience but also the intellectual and spiritual traditions of their society.

At Shanshui Magazine, we believe that art is a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue. By exploring the encounter between Chinese and Western artistic traditions, we aim to build bridges between two great civilizations and encourage a renewed understanding of art and nature.

Chinese shanshui (mountain and water) painting — with its 1,500 years of history — offers an alternative vision of the world, where harmony between humans and nature is central. This philosophy contrasts yet beautifully complements Western aesthetics, opening new ways of seeing and creating.

Our magazine presents contemporary Chinese and international artists, research on painting theory, and reflections on environmental aesthetics. We wish to make these ideas accessible not only to academics but to anyone curious about the living dialogue between art, ecology, and culture.

Through this magazine, we hope to promote a form of artistic expression that helps us rethink our relationship with reality, with nature, and with each other — beyond cultural boundaries.

CONTENTS

8 **MANIFESTO**

Why is mountains and waters painting of great value in the contemporary world and why should the Village re-evaluate it?

14 **SILENCE WITHOUT A NAME**

UNDER THE MACKEREL SKY - *POEMS*

By; René Böll

36 **THE ART OF WU SHENGYUAN 吳盛源**
A PAINTER OF THE LINGNAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING

By; Wu Jiayin

50 **CONCRETION AND ABSTRACTION IN CHINESE PAINTING: THE *MOUNTAIN VILLA* SCROLL BY LI GONGLIN**

By; Thorsten Schirmer

72 **THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN SHITAO 'S *HUAYULU***
PART 2

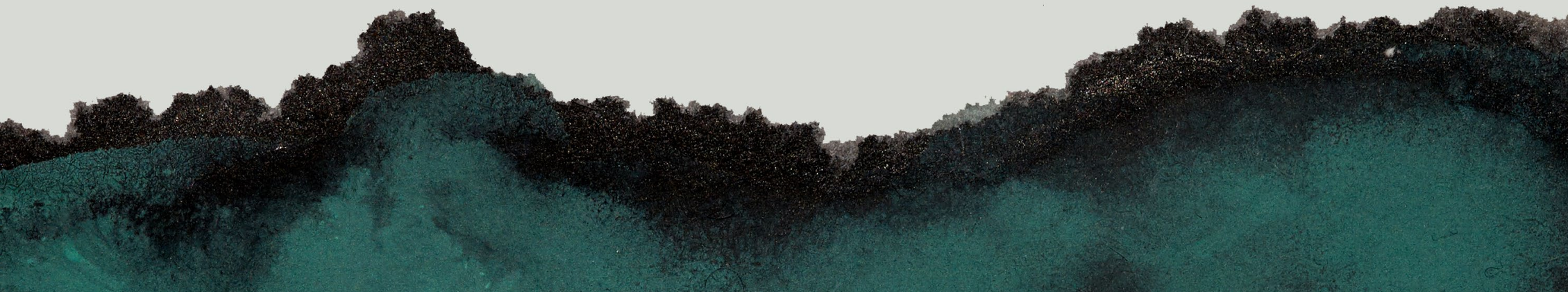
The present essay is an attempt to explore to core values of Shitao 石涛 's famous treatise on painting, the *Huayulu* 《画语录》

By; Claudio D. Lucchi

86 **INTERVIEW WITH GLENN PARSONS**

Glenn Parsons is philosopher and associate Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto.

By; Zuha Rasheed



OUR APPROACH

FROM THE FIGURE OF THE CHINESE INTELLECTUAL ARTIST TO CONTEMPORANEITY.

DURING THE EIGHTH CENTURY CHINA, A NEW FIGURE OF INTELLECTUAL ARTIST WAS BORN: THIS FIGURE WOULD BECOME TOPICAL IN THE CHINESE CULTURAL PANORAMA AND MADE ITS WAY TO THE PRESENT DAY.

WENREN HUA 文人画, IS THE ONE WHO, FOLLOWING THE HUMANISTIC VALUES AND TEACHINGS OF THE TRADITION, UPDATES AND APPLIES THEM TO THE ARTISTIC-INTELLECTUAL NEEDS OF HIS TIME. THIS PROCESS HAS NEVER STOPPED, AND STILL PERSISTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD.

THE WENREN HUA ENCOMPASSES THE POET, THE PAINTER, THE CALLIGRAPHER, THE THEORIST, THE SCHOLAR AND THE INTELLECTUAL IN GENERAL IN A SINGLE FIGURE AND SEES THE CULTIVATION OF THE SPIRIT AND MIND AS ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES OF HIS/HER WORK.

IN THIS WAY, A CLOSE LINK IS ESTABLISHED BETWEEN PRACTICE AND ARTISTIC THEORY; AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS NO SEPARATION BETWEEN THE ARTS, AND THERE IS A COMMON THREAD BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL PRACTICE AND MATERIAL APPLICATION.

OF COURSE THIS FIGURE IS CLOSELY LINKED TO CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE, BUT THIS DOES NOT MAKE IT LESS COMPATIBLE WITH THE ARTISTIC-CULTURAL NEEDS OF WESTERNIZED CONTEMPORANEITY.

IT ALSO FITS NATURALLY INTO THE TREND OF ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS, WHICH IS AN EXPRESSIVE CHANNEL OF CONTEMPORARY ART OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE, GIVEN THAT THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS THAT AFFLICT OUR SOCIETY ARE OFTEN LINKED TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE DESTRUCTIVE APPROACH THAT CONTEMPORARY MEN HAVE TOWARDS IT.

RESPECT FOR NATURE AND THE NEED TO PRESERVE IT BY LIVING WITH IT IN HARMONY ARE INTRINSIC ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE THOUGHT AND THAT OF THE WENREN HUA, WHICH SEE MAN AND NATURE AS TWO ELEMENTS THAT ARE PART OF THE SAME SYSTEM: IN THESE TERMS, IN ORDER TO PRESERVE HUMAN LIFE NATURAL EXISTENCE MUST ALSO BE PROTECTED, OR ELSE WE WOULD GO TOWARDS THE DECAY OF BOTH.

MANIFESTO

We find ourselves living in the era of globalization. Thanks to the infosphere that we live in, with just one click we can be in Togo, with two clicks you can be studying Sanskrit, with three you're already updated on what's going on in Bhutan, and with four more clicks you're listening to a piece played with the duduk, and immediately after we could be looking at two whirling dervishes. In half a day we become experts in Armenian music, Sufi spirituality, Himalayan geopolitics and in any other aspect of world culture.

Fantastic. Finally, a world without cultural barriers, devoted to exchange and access to mutual knowledge. In this global village without borders, we dance to the beat of superficiality, sloppy culture and of cultural arrogance, where ignorance is adorned with two-dimensional images, where the concept of "knowing that you do not know" has been abolished, although without knowing.

Ah I forgot, in this Village the chief is western, the customs and habits are mostly western, the linguistic and material means of communication are western, like almost every intellectual expression and world view of its inhabitants. The inhabitants tend to ignore what is found outside the Village, not by choice, but by condition, not out of lack of curiosity, but because of the limited means. The Village is truly global on a physical level, it truly embraces the entire earth's surface, but in fact it remains on the surface, it does not deepen, and if it deepens it does it in its own way, as it would in the centre from which it developed. In fact, the Village is ancient and full of History and histories, it has always had to do with multiculturalism, always in expansion and translation, but only recently has it reached global status.

The Village is now global, so everyone is welcome but the rules to follow are those of the village head. Everyone can bring something to the table, but it will still have to be adapted to the matrix of the Village.

With these premises, it is possible to face and analyse infinite issues concerning the actual state of the alleged globalization. Of how, for instance, it is believed to know different cultures, but that in reality this knowledge is based only on a store of empty images which are then filled with the world view of the aforementioned head of the Village. The same goes for that mercantile capitalism that has come to every corner of the globe, but that manages to give the best of itself only if it follows the needs of the Village.
We stand against a single world view, when in fact there are many. The ones that does not support diversity, but translates them, one that does not make them participate in the debate with their own voices, but accepts them only after a trial of metamorphosis. We are against the imperialism of tastes and customs, of judgment, of means of expression, and of what to express, a situation which inevitably leads to a cultural flattening. Against this self-proclaimed global Village, it does not have the ability to see neighbouring villages, since he believes that all possible villages are within him.

We as Sino-artists (mostly of non-Chinese origin, who live in China, who devote themselves to the study and practice Chinese painting, even without having a structured training of Western origin behind them), will focus on the areas concerning our cultural sphere, precisely that of Chinese art. Especially those related to painting, with a particular eye for landscape painting, which from now on we will call according to the Chinese denomination, mountain and water painting

"*shanshui hua* 山 水 画"

The main will is to communicate with the Village through our art and our words, trying to present one of the many shaded areas with which it is scattered. Our task is to find a language that is intelligible to the Village as well as faithful to the original meaning. Without smoothing its diversity, without avoiding clashes, without sweetening the pill. In this way it will be the Village that will make the effort to understand, and only in this way will the communication be successful. In fact, we trust in the Village's ability to understand languages not forged by itself.

The reasons that drive us in this campaign are varied and erudition is not one of those. At best it can be a side effect.

One of the biggest problems of the Village is that he believes that only movements of progress or evolutions exist inside it, only he has reached the status of "modern", and those who are not indigenous come from a static culture, backward and anchored to the past; without the use of the means forged by the Village and without its revolutionary spirit no one can participate in the dialogue of contemporaneity. So, to finally get into the subject, in the Village Chinese painting is traditional, therefore linked to the past, unable to evolve, something good just for the art history books and museums, worthy of respect, but with the same respect that is given for archaeological finds.

There is no conception of a modern or contemporary Chinese painting, also because when the term Chinese painting is pronounced, for some reason it is always accompanied by the adjective "traditional", which clearly denies the concept of modernity. Chinese art can only be defined as modern if expressed through the means and processes of modern western art.

Revelation! There is modern and contemporary Chinese art; mountain and water painting has been evolveing for at least 1500 years, and continues to evolve, and other painting exppressions are even older. As obvious as it seems, China is extremely large, therefore there are many centres of cultural irradiation, and for this reason there are various schools within China that follow different pictorial expressions. Consequently there is not just one movement of contemporary Chinese painting.

Our main objective follows:

To spread the knowledge of contemporary Chinese painting outside of China, and to give voice to the great artists of the last century as well as to the new young artists.

Why is it important you may ask? For starters, in order to make sense of the term globalization. But above all, to enrich the Village and to redefine its ideas of intellectual absolutism.

Chinese art, together with all the other intellectual expressions of China, refers to a system of values that has come down to the present day from ancient times. This great apparatus of knowledge and ideas has influenced and is still influencing the world view of Chinese people and of course also their artistic expressions. The same discourse can be re-proposed in a general way also to the evolution of the western mind, a process that probably was less coherent than the Chinese one, which however led to the formation of various expressions of thought rooted in the conception of the world that the Village forged during its evolution. And this is exactly the key point of our reasoning, once the world interpretation system is established, it is almost impossible to get out of it, as it is invisible, and its boundaries are not recognizable. Because it being the only view you know, you believe that it is the only view that exists. Just to clarify, it's like those unfortunate people who were chained in the platonic cave. It wasn't until someone came in from the outside, did they realize the condition they were in.

This was also the case for China until the mid-nineteenth century. China behaved like the Village, just another Village that did not see those who were outside of it, except of course through its own modalities. And even though external cultural influences were accepted, it was always retranslated in Chinese terms, just like the Village does. As a consequence, there was a sense of cultural superiority compared to that which was not Chinese. Until one terrible day, when the barbarians arrived with cannons and rifles and destroyed the armies of the great empire. On that day, besides the fall of many lives, many certainties also fell in terms of value. Their system had not protected them from catastrophe, as it once did since the dawn of Chinese culture. This was not the first time that China fell into the hands of foreigners, and every time the foreigners were sinicized. Thus, their cultural continuity persisted. However, the value system was still slowly collapsing to the point where it almost disappeared. Since then it has rebuilt itself, but the system of the other foreign villages took a hold as well, strong of its modernity.

Accordingly, in contemporary China it can be said that there are two systems, the original and the imported one. The same could be said for the world of art, but art can be applied at will on any area. This has created a unique situation where the two worlds communicate with each other, sometimes one taking over the other, creating conflicts but also a very fertile ground for creativity.

It is exactly for this reason that we want to make this new system of thought known to the Village, only then will it be able to see its own boundaries, so that it will be able to ask new questions and give itself new answers.

Let's take a concrete example. The ancient western visual arts and the Renaissance up to modernity, basically acted in the field of mimesis. In painting, all the techniques to represent the visual aspect of the surrounding world comes together. Now coming back to the Village, to top it all, there was this terrifying yoke called Albertan's perspective. The Village gave a great deal of value to the sight, making it almost the only tool for perceiving reality. Establishing invisible perceptual borders because they were all-encompassing. However, at a certain point artists and intellectuals got tired of this conception and thus historical avant-garde was born. Unfortunately, not knowing any other way of perceiving the world other than the anthropocentric one of the gaze, they found themselves in a rather uncomfortable position, so much so that the path ended with destruction of the form and that of the painting itself, and having to resort to new media to be able to express themselves. It is precisely for these reasons that in contemporary era we refer to paintings as an "old lady" who keeps up with new artistic expressions with great difficulty.

So where is all this getting at? In China, the influence of western art came between the late 1800s and early 1900's. The first to arrive was via Japan, the realistic techniques of the Barbizon school. And what were the most shocking innovations for the Chinese? Mimesis, focal perspective, chiaroscuro, and all those techniques which at the time in the West were considered regressed, representatives of a system that in those years the avant-gardes despised because of its anti-contemporary expressions. Why was this seen in China as revolutionary and innovative? Because traditional pictorial theories disgusted the view and representation of form as perceived by our eyes, therefore it was an almost completely unexplored area.

China has had the good fortune of meeting and accepting a different way of interpreting the world, so why should the Village be deprived of it?

Just how much could a new way of understanding reality help the old painting of the Village? A whole world would open up, which should not mimic the Chinese one, but be inspired by it. So, we also take sides against the supremacism of sight and consequently against anthropocentrism. Our desire is to introduce these new visions, these new conceptions, and these new values. Not that the Village is completely unaware of it, but this knowledge is hidden in academic publications, accessible to those interested in the subject, but very far from the world of contemporary art or anyone else.

To conclude, we will introduce one of these intrinsic aspects of Chinese art which can be of great help and source of inspiration for our beloved Village. Why is mountain and water painting of great value in the contemporary world and why should the Village re-evaluate it? In the great pictorial experience of the Village, landscape painting as an independent genre was born late and died early. The fact that in China it is already the higher form of painting and has a millennium and a half of history should make us ask questions about how it has probably been underestimated. Well, in reality it has not been underestimated, in fact there is no right and wrong in art, it has been evaluated according to the means that the Village head, according to the conceptions and ideas, precisely for this

reason, I repeat, we must open the doors to new value systems.

Art cannot be alienated from the reality in which it is produced, and one of the most important themes for us is that of ecology, in fact this hyper capitalist Village has massacred the world in which we live and does not seem to want to take steps back. Many have already set in motion to counter this destructive madness, but there is no contest. In the Village there has recently been talk of environmental aesthetics that lashes out against anthropocentrism to concert on environmental beauties, therefore going against one, the axioms of western aesthetics since ancient Greece, against that conception that sees man as the superior creature and dominant in the ecumene. This new point of view, at least for the Village, is one of the basic aspects of Chinese ethics, philosophy and aesthetics, is found in the texts at the base of Chinese culture, at the basis of Confucian philosophy and Daoist thought and continues to be repeated until modern times, conception that does not just appreciate environmental beauties, but its holistic conception of the universe puts man on the same level as any other creation of nature. In *Yi Zhuan* 易传 (5th century BCE), a commentary on *Yi Jing* 易经, it is written that “the greatest virtue of heaven and earth is life” (天地之大德曰生), that is to say that the greatest virtue is to create an environment where all life forms and natural elements can coexist in harmony.

For this reason, too, the category of still life does not exist in Chinese painting, in fact for the Chinese artist it would be absurd to paint lifeless subjects.
For these and other reasons, the Village and the artists that reside in it will benefit from learning Chinese art. Mountain and water painting will inspire them, the beauty of nature will awaken the minds and set the minds in motion. The boundaries of the Village will begin to appear and we can finally begin to break them down.

Corrie Lake, oil over acryl on Canvas, 285x163, 2015

Silence without a Name

By; René Böll

It is not easy having to explain the complexity of artistic creation in a few words. Having to force into the restricting and established world of analytical abstractness everything that the artist himself experiences during the creative process, what he reflects on and what he finally expresses in his works – is often like being on a knife's edge. We can come closer to the artist and his work or deprive him of his authenticity. It is not always possible to do justice to the artist and his work.

For what makes an artist's work interesting and attractive, and gives depth to what is superficial, is often exactly those areas which elude the analytical mind and which cannot be perceived by the beholder at first.

Every artist has his own perception and consequently his own aesthetics as well. Both areas, perception and aesthetics, form an interwoven whole which has to be discovered if we want to go deeper into a work and find a way of comprehending it.

There are two important force-fields which exert an effect on my artistic work – firstly, the European painting tradition, which is particularly visible in the form of expression and the formal aesthetics of my paintings, and secondly my understanding of artistic creation, which is influenced by the spirit of Chinese philosophy, in particular Daoism, and relates to the traditional approach of Chinese ink painting.

Chinese have a very poetical but at the same time very difficult to understand language respecting there ink painting techniques: Chinese ink which, in the words of Huang Binhong, has to be as dry as an autumn wind when using the "dry brush" technique, but at the same time as moist as spring rain.

I tried to acquire the four different basic techniques of applying ink, in addition to "dry" also moist, light and dark, which constitute the basic skills of painting with ink.

However, it is not just the materials but also the work process which require concentration and precision. The use of the brush and its touch demand from the artist the considering of "space" and "time", where "space" means the way in which the brush touches the paper, which in turn depends on the type of the brush tip and the angle at which the brush is held. The Chinese brushes for painting and calligraphy are made from very different types of hair including sheep's, goat's, horse's and wolf's hair. "Time" means the speed with which the brush is moved across the paper. When using the lightly glued and, therefore, highly absorbent Xuan paper, the stroke becomes broader the slower it is performed. Moreover, the ink allows gradual transition and variation in tone from the most delicate grey to the deepest black. The basis for this type of painting is the use of a particular Chinese Xuan paper, which in the West is only very inadequately referred to as "rice paper".

I studied the painting techniques of the baroque and renaissance period for some time. I was always intrigued by "how Rembrandt managed to paint these lights and darks. The paintings by Rubens, constructed in several, very thin layers, applied in such a fluent and easy manner, have particularly influenced me as regards painting technique and have characterized my way of working."

My intense studying of colour, and the exceptional significance I attach to it, has its roots here. I collected an unusual wealth of the most diverse colours – earth colours and mineral colours, hundreds of pigments of natural earth colours, ground minerals such as orpiment, vermilion, jasper, coral, malachite, as well as plant and animal colours. The latter, however, are often subject to fading, but I have also collected a large number of modern organic and inorganic colours which when mixed with other pigments come close to plant colours. I prefer natural colours because in my experience they are more vivid and have a much larger spectrum. Different inks are also found among the treasures I keep in my studio: such as glistening oil-soot ink and the less shiny pine-soot ink, also ancient inks, which is particularly well suited for the greyer tones. I prepare them myself, as I do with almost all of my colours, and not until I need them.

For the underpainting of my paintings on canvas I use various basic elements like egg, oil, wax-soap, casein, resin, balms and gum arabic, sometimes also acrylic dispersion.

However, these are mixed with other pigments, similar to plant colours which display a larger spectrum and are not as "garish" as most colours used today in industry, advertising and art. In this way I try to obtain vivid yet permanent colours similar to plant colours used in the past, particularly by book illuminators, which unfortunately are barely colour-fast to light. It makes a difference to me whether a colour is manufactured synthetically or whether it is thousands of years old.

On top of underpainting, the picture is built up in many varnished, semi-opaque or opaque layers using oil

colours produced in a way similar to handcrafted colours, as well as oil colours freshly ground each time whenever special tones are needed. The varnish, the adding of different transparent layers on top of each other, plays an important role in my paintings. Through the varnish I can use both the additive and the subtractive blending of colours in my paintings. I have always been intrigued by how Rembrandt managed to paint these lights and darks. The paintings by Rubens, constructed in several, very thin layers, applied in such a fluent and easy manner, have particularly influenced me as regards painting technique and have characterized my way of working. If we look at the originals, we see how lightly, how confidently and how vividly the colours have been applied. The spontaneity of the way the brush is moved by both artists bears resemblance to that in Chinese ink painting.

Many of my small watercolours work as testimonies to colour, the power of which could almost be said to be demonstrated reciprocally to the limited expressive possibilities of the small format.

Critics said that the beholder of my landscapes painted in egg tempera and oil is inevitably attracted by the atmospheric effects of light produced by the colours, which sometimes appear elevated to mythical heights and give the actual theme of the painting a mysterious, hermetic character. Echoes of the metaphor-like use of light and colour in Turner's later paintings come to mind immediately, but also associations with the powerful, rounded and fluid forms in Edvard Munch's painting are induced when looking at these barren shapes of landscape in dark, earthy tones.

However, my language of colours and shape lacks that dramatization which is more or less predominant in the works of these painters, or, as one might be tempted to say, in the European painting tradition as a whole.

At the centre of my aesthetics of colour is harmonization – a harmonization which relies on the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang, in which opposing as well as complementing elements are taken to be a natural whole. Thus, properties such as light and dark, warm and cold, firm and fluid – basically all those characteristics which meet in the colour – have to be explored and captured so that they can be brought together in a natural, harmonious whole. I prefer the varnish technique, and the possibilities of additive and subtractive blending of colours comes closest to my idea of the harmonious changeability of colours. I have coined the terms "to yingify" and "to yangify" to describe the change of colours from the warm pole to the cold pole, a change full of nuances.
I have intensely studied the mixing of colour. I am less interested in theories on colour than I am in the considerations of how I can change a given colour by mixing it in such a way that I obtain exactly the tone I wants. When it comes to the actual process of painting the mixing is done intuitively. You have to have internalized colour and technique in such a way that you don't have to think about them. Many of my watercolours are also painted in several layers. Apart from ready-made watercolours, I also use relatively coarsely ground pigments – similar to the way I also use them for oil painting. These pigments are soaked into the paper in a very fluid way with gum arabic, through which almost three-dimensional effects are achieved.

Cillin, oil over acryl on Canvas, 160x179, 2012-2014

It is in Chinese ink painting and calligraphy that my understanding of colour based on the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang, derived from my concept are expressed artistically in the most distinct way. I devoted myself to the genre of Chinese ink painting, in which the black ink unites the essence of all colours, as it were, and in which the natural phenomenon of changeability and the mastery of this has found its most subtle expression

It is perhaps the specific spirit which has to be underlying in order to master ink painting. If painting is understood as a specific way of expressing comprehension, then the specific form of comprehending Chinese ink painting is the Chinese philosophy of nature, with its particular expression: Daoism.

Clearly it is this connection to nature being so closely linked to painting which comes so close to my temperament and understanding of artistic creation.

If I quote as the title for my paintings Bada Shanren, that original Buddhist-Daoist monk painter of the 17th century, or Wang Wei, the famous

Cillin, oil over acryl on Canvas, 160x179, 2012-2014 x3

poet and painter of the Tang period, it is because in a particular way these men have expressed in their art a Daoist view of the world, a view attached to nature.

Thus the landscapes depicted in my paintings are, just like the Chinese landscape paintings, not views of concrete objects but vehicles of meaning for something which is underlying and reaches beyond the external appearance of things. The landscape, in Chinese this word is formed from the two signs for mountain, *shan* 山 and water, *shui* 水, is a synonym for nature in its broadest sense. Nature particularly enables us to see beyond the external appearance of things without having to forfeit the joy and fascination at its forms and its variety.

The landscapes in my paintings are in many respects reminiscent of the world of imagination of Chinese Daoism. My landscapes radiate quietness and solitude. They are places which are far away from the distracting and tiring influences of the din of civilization, in them time is different from the time of history. Nature is left to herself. Her elements – fire, earth, water, air, the sun and the moon, seas and mountains – follow the Dao, the "eternal way" in continuous change. Nor is man, embedded in nature, the measure of all things. In the form of death, the skeleton or the skull – a very frequent motive in my work – he too is integrated into this great cycle of Dao. In the process of dissolution, man is not dramatic or romantically small, but natural without any sign of resistance. Life and death, like all phenomena of nature, have no presage.

This view of the world may disconcert many people, they do not know it or perhaps they do not know it any more.

Many titles, which I formerly gave to my works, such as *Forgetting Oneself*, *Corresponding to Nature*, or *Fearless Emptiness* are Daoist terms as well and signalize my intention and method at the same time.

The expressions describe the different elements which underlie the Chinese term *Wuwei* 无为, "non-action". *Wuwei* embraces many aspects, also including the close observation of nature through contemplative reflection – only in this way can the qualities and natural tendencies of things be captured and followed. *Wuwei* further comprises practical experience with tools – the ancient Daoists were not only enthusiastic alchemists but, unlike the Confucianists, they also valued handicrafts, because handicrafts generally understood the true nature of materials better than sophistic knowledge. Finally, *Wuwei* also embraces that inner peace and quiet and balance, that "emptying oneself" of subjective conditionality, of the wanting which moves against what is natural – which today we would call manipulated demands.

Still, I make numerous trips taking me to regions with visibly powerful landscapes: Ecuador with the Andes, the jungle and the Galápagos Islands; Ireland, in particular Achill Island; Kenya; Russia the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts in North West China; but also the countryside back home as well as my garden are inspirations for me. The landscape that particularly appeals to me, is that of the Arctic and the Antarctic; that's where I would like to go to experience snow and ice intensely. I believe, that my relationship with nature is closer than that of many of my colleagues. I view the subject attentively and records my impressions in sketchbooks in order to absorb them in a concentrated way. Later, in the studio I paint from memory, completely free. In the course of this, naturalistic forms recede into the background and lose importance. Thus I attempt "to paint without intent and purpose" – in the tradition of the Daoist *Wuwei*, the concept of "non-action" or of "not demanding", in order to express my soul and feelings. In this way pictures are painted as if done in a trance. I am best able to achieve this at night or at dawn.

Like the Daoist alchemist in search of the elixir of life, I am always in search of ever newer colour substances and mixtures of colours. I learned Chinese ink painting techniques from Chinese artists and became absorbed in the meaning of Chinese philosophy and painting.

I meditated and practised *taichi* and *qigong* for years. It is necessary to stimulate those energies through exercises, to unblock them and free them from obstacles, and to make them flow. These exercises are not only meant to strengthen the abilities of the body but also the mind. The relation of these exercises, in particular of their medial aspect, to artistic creation is well known. (*Qi* 气 has, by the way, become an important aesthetic term of quality in Chinese calligraphy and painting. If a picture or an example of calligraphy does not have *qi*, its quality is impaired).

My art is concerned with "self-achievement", creating spaces within, and is less directed towards the outside, aggressive self-portrayal, and because of that it tends to move me closer to the Far Eastern image of the artist than that of many of my Western contemporaries.

In this sense my ink painting is not attempted at copying Chinese originals either, but expression of a spirit which is capable of moving outside trends in popular art and capable of creating its own worlds of imagery in relation to other cultures.

Chinese critics said, that I have found an authentic form of expression in my works with ink, as regards brush technique, structure of the picture and composition.

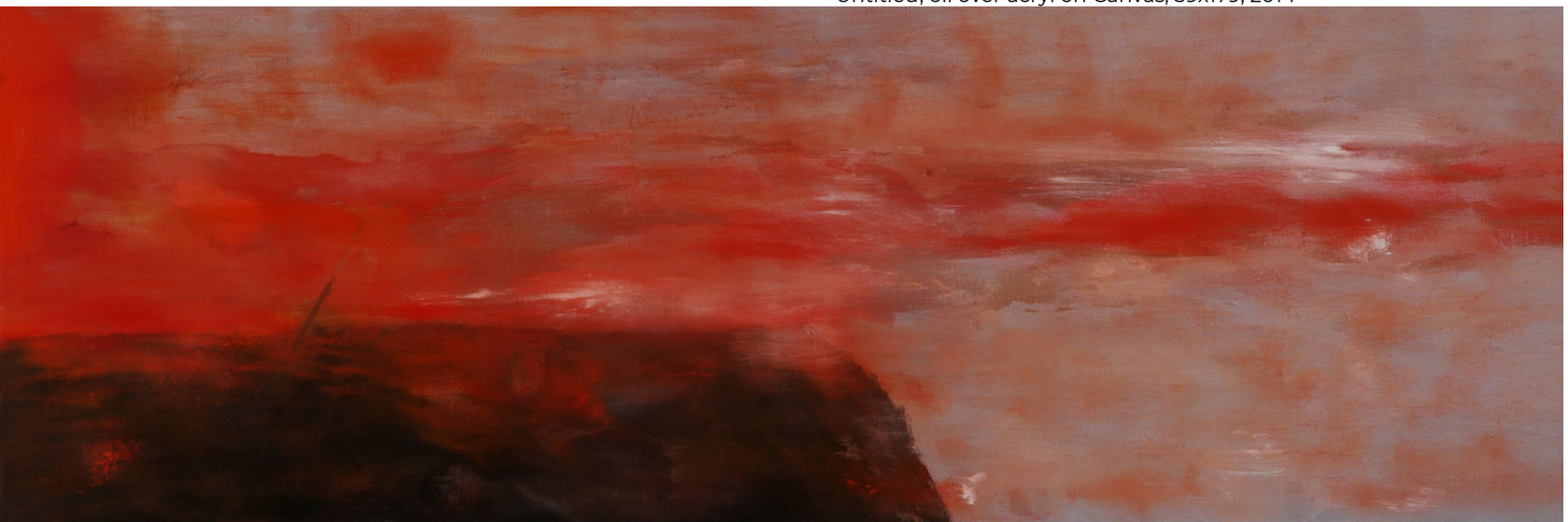
Liu Xiaochun, a well-known art critic, commented that I am penetrating deep into Chinese culture and comprehend it. This attitude distinguishes me completely from the other artists who dealt with Far Eastern art. He writes: "Artists like Hans Hartung, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Jackson Pollock, Pierre Soulages, Antonio Tàpies and others used Far Eastern art as a kind of quarry, but they paid little attention to ink technique and the philosophical backgrounds."

Thematically, I take up motifs of my oil paintings and egg tempera paintings. However, these motifs, such as the sun, the moon, mountains and water, appear to have detached themselves from the overall context of my landscapes, and are developing a life of their own. Nature suddenly seems very close, its concrete forms more and more turn into their qualities, which now reveal themselves in ink and brush technique: light and dark, from jet black to light grey, wet and dry, soft and hard, smooth and fissured, concentration and dissolution all come to the foreground. The concreteness which eluded the vision of the landscapes becomes abstract, abstract becomes concrete. Vision and detail meet and blend together in the infinite space of the white Xuan paper.

"The dimension which counts for the creative man is the space which he creates for himself. The inner space is closer to infinity than the other one and it is the privilege of a balanced spirit – and the search for equilibrium is essential – to be just as aware of the inner space as things external." (Graves)

In my mind prehistoric art has as much contemporary relevance as to days art – the same holds true for East Asian art or pre-Columbian excavations. Many modern art movements mean little or nothing to me. My esteem for Rembrandt, Goya, Odilon Redon, Turner, Munch, Klee and many others continues to grow, even as it diminishes for others as Beckmann, the expressionist. Other artists as Bonnard, whom I rejected in the past, I now admire greatly and new one who were previously unknown to me, such as Frederic Edwin Church I am constantly adding to my list of respected painters. I follow no canon in my work and embrace no ideological tenets or goals. It is irrelevant to me whether my works are "modern" or "trendy" or as an exhibition in London was called a "sensation".

Untitled, oil over acryl on Canvas, 59x179, 2014



René Böll, a painter & graphic artist, was born in Cologne in 1948. His autodidactic study of drawing and painting began in 1963. In 1966 he began lessons with Bernhard Müller-Feyen, and in 1967, studies of painting and printmaking (primarily lithography) in Cologne and Vienna. He devotes himself to painting, drawing and printmaking (etchings + lithography). In addition to his work as a visual artist, he worked as a publisher, and he is also a co-founder of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the administrator of the literary works of Heinrich Böll. From the 70's onwards, René Böll worked intensively with Chinese ink techniques and Chinese philosophy. His preferred motifs are landscapes that reflect an intense preoccupation with nature and a preference for natural colors. His works are the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions at home and abroad, including in China, Japan, USA and South America. He is the author of numerous publications, and the editor of the six-volume edition: The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh, "Cillìnì" Children's burial grounds in Achill etc. And as of October 2002, a professor at the Beijing Nationality University of China.

Unter dem Makrelenhimmel

Cillíní – oder: die toten kinder von Achill

By; René Böll

Under the Mackerel Sky

Cillíní - or: the dead children of Achill

translated into English by Sujata Bhatt & Michael Augustin

Faoi Spéir Dhroim an Ronnaigh

Cillíní – nó páistí marbha Acla

Traschruthaithe i nGaeilge ag Gabriel Rosenstock

Since the mid fifties when I was a child and spent the summer months on Achill Island, I was very impressed with the cillin in Dookinella on top of the cliffs. This was the only one we knew of at that time. I remember, new graves appeared there until the end of the fifties and probably even until the beginning of the sixties. I never forgot about it and when I was older I worked on an artistic project about the cillíni on Achill Island and the Currane Peninsula. I have also written poems directly addressing this theme. The phrase "children's burial ground" refers to an unconsecrated place used primarily, though not exclusively, for the burial of unbaptised children. Unbaptised babies could not be buried in consecrated ground so they were buried between sunset and sunrise outside the walls of the graveyard or in a disused graveyard, a cillin or a ringfort. The church stated that these children could not enter heaven but that they would remain in Limbo forever and that they would never be able to meet their parents again. Local folklore relates that adults, particularly unknown foreigners such as sailors washed ashore, strangers to the community and those who died by suicide, were also sometimes interred in these burial grounds. Frequently the locations chosen were abandoned Early Christian church sites or ringforts, but children were also buried in places such as haggards and fields, beside boundary fences and crossroads, under lone bushes, in the clefts of cliffs, on the seashore or outside a graveyard wall. Children's burial grounds are frequently located within a pre-existing early ecclesiastical site or ringfort. Those sites which are not associated with an older monument are usually marked now by little more than an area of uncultivated stony ground, often raised above the general surroundings, To this day I have come to know of 22 cillini on Achill and the Currane Peninsula. Just a few are marked with a little monument or a cross. In my paintings I want to make visible the invisible, the things behind it, the unwritten but never forgotten history of these children. My work is an epitaph for the children of Achill Island and for all of Ireland.

Kinder die nie lebten
Liegen unter steinen am meer
Makrelenhimmel

Children who never lived
Lie under stones by the sea
Mackerel sky

Páistí nár mhair riamh
Faoi chlocha cois cósta
Spéir dhroim an ronnaigh

*

Etwas besseres als den tod
Fand ich nicht
Bei meinem besuch auf dieser erde

Something better than death
I did not find
During my visit to this earth

Seal abhus
Is níor tháinig mé ar aon ní
Níos fearr ná an bás

*

Mein ewig schlaf
Bereits in dir
Begann er, mutter

My eternal sleep
Already it started
Within you, mother

Suan síoraí
Ionatsa a cuireadh tús leis
A mháithrín

*

Bevor ich lebte verließ ich euch schon
Bin im nirgendwo auf immer
MMeeresrauschen

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

I left you even before i lived
I am nowhere for ever
The sound of the sea

D'fhágas thú sular mhaireas
Nílim aon áit
Glór síoraí na mara

*

Nicht ins paradies
nNcht in die hölle soll ich kommen
Wohin denn?

Barred from paradise
Barred from hell
Where to instead?

Ní fheicfeadsa parthas
Ifreann ni fheicfead
Cá bhfuil mo thriall?

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

*

Namenlos werde ich begraben
Gebeugten hauptes mein vater
Den rücken zum meer

Nameless, I am buried
My father's head bowed
His back turned to the sea

Adhlacfar gan ainm mé
Ceann m'athar cromtha
Droim le muir

*

Keine gnade hatte der priester
Verscharren mußtet ihr mich
Wie einen hund

No mercy shown by the priest
Hastily you had to bury me
Like a dog

Sagart gan trócaire
B'éigean mé a dhumpáil
Mar ghadhar

*

Zur erde gerichtet mein blick
Deinen toten körper sehe ich
Dieses bild bleibt mir für immer

My eyes on the ground
It's your dead body I see
This image will stay with me forever

Mo shúile sa chré
Do chorpsa a fheicim
Ní scarfaidh an radharc uaim

*

Grassoden schließen dein grab
Trostlos deine eltern
Ein kormoran taucht ins meer

Grass sods seal your grave
Your parents, unconsoled
A cormorant dives into the sea

Séala d'uaighe: scraithíní
Sólás níl i ndán dod mhuintir
Tumann broigheall sa mhuir

*

Im schatten des Slievemore
Auf den klippen liegt dein grab
Nachts kam dein vater

In Slievemore's shadow
Your grave lies on the cliffs
Your father came here at night

Faoi scáil an tSléibhe Mhóir
D'uaigh ar na haillte
T'athair ar cuairt istoíche

*

So kalt das herz der kirche
Wo war sie, die gnadenreiche
Bei meinem tod?

So cold the heart of mother church
Where was she, the gracious one
At the hour of my death?

Nach fuar é croí na heaglaise
Nár leath orm binn dá fallaing
Uair mo bháis?

*

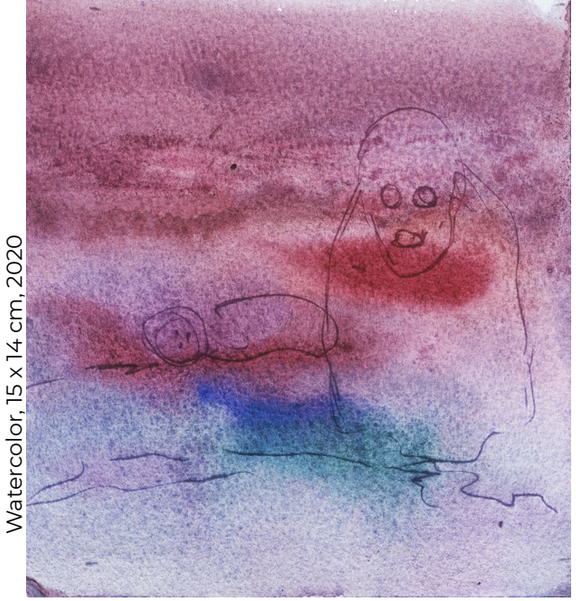
Die mutter habe ich nie gesehen
Den vater, geschwister und das meer
Ich liege im moor

Mother I never saw
Father, my siblings - nor the sea
I lie in the bog

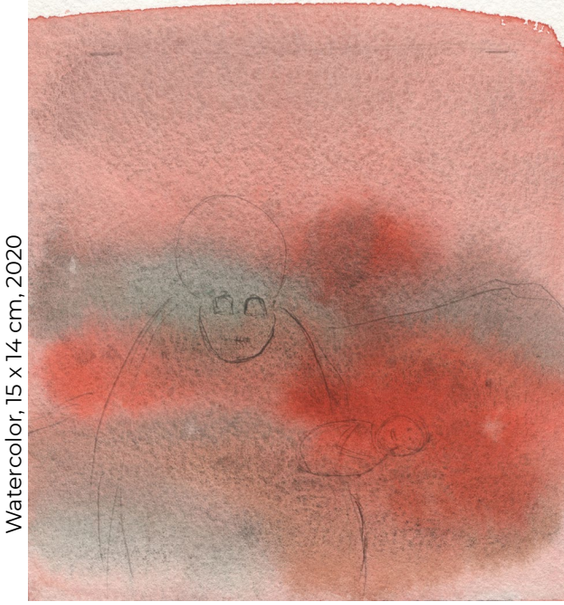
Mam ní fhaca riamh
Daid, siblíní ná an mhuir
An móinteán mo leaba

*

Watercolor, 15 x 14 cm, 2020



Watercolor, 15 x 14 cm, 2020



Watercolor, 15 x 14 cm, 2020

Am meer steine im gras
Darunter dein grab
Friedhof der kinder

By the sea, stones in the grass
Beneath them, your grave
Cemetery of the children

Clocha san fhéar cois farraige
D'uaighse faoina mbun
Cillín

*

Über dem strand
Mein grab in Dukinella
Im meer baden kinder

Above the beach
My grave in Dukinella
Children swim in the sea

Os cionn na trá
Atá m'uaighse i nDumha Cinn Aille
Páistí ag snámh san fharraige

*

Mein einziger besuch
In langen jahren
Die Möwe auf meinem grab

My only visitor
In all these long years
The seagull on my grave

Gan de chuairteoir agam
I gcaitheamh na mblianta
Ach faoileán ar m'uaigh

*

Unter einem grauen stein
Liegst du, kleiner mensch
Achtlos der wanderer

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

Watercolor, 15 x 31 cm, 2020

Under a grey stone
You lie, little human
Careless, the passer-by

Faoi chloch ghlas
Do luí, a bheagadáin
Gan aird ag an bhfánaí ort

*

Gischt weht über dein grab
Grau der himmel, der stein
Ein kormoran

Sea spray blows over your grave
The sky, grey. a stone
A cormorant

Cáitheadh mara os cionn d'uaighe
Spéir liath, cloch
Broigheall

*

Der priester verbot mein begräbnis
In geweihtem grund
So kam ich her zu euch, kinder
An diesen ort

The priest forbade my burial
On sacred ground
That's how I came to join you here,
Children
In this place

Ní ligfeadh an sagart dom
Luí i dtalamh bheannaithe
Sin a thug anseo in bhur measc mé
A leanaí

*

Mein grab war das letzte
Am atlantic drive
Nach mir kam niemand

My grave was the last one
On atlantic drive
After me there was nobody

M'uaighse an uaigh dheireanach
Ar shlí an atlantaigh
Níor tháinig éinne im dhiaidh

*

Vom verborgenen ahnst du nichts,-tourist
Fotos machst du vom meer
Unter deinen wasserdichten wander-schuhen
Liege ich

Tourist, you don't know what's hid-den here
You take photos of the sea
Under your waterproof walking shoes
I lie

Chinese ink on Xuan paper, 42 x 310, 2016

A thurasóir, ní heol duitse cad atá
ceilte ort
Glacann tú grianghraif den mhuir
Faoi do bhróga siúlóide uiscedhíona-
cha
Mo lui
*
Dein grab am meer unvergessen
Du namenlos im nirgendwo
Gelbe flechten der einzige schmuck

Your grave by the sea, unforgotten
You, nameless, in the void
Yellow lichen the only embellishment

D'uaigh cois farraige nach ndearúdfar
Léicean buí mar mhaisiú uirthi
Taoi gan ainm sa bhfolús

*

Nur geflüstert wurde über mich
Und doch vergaßt ihr mich nie
Meine eltern

There was only whispering about me
But still you never forgot me
My parents

Cogar mogar fúm sin uile
Ach níor dhein sibhse dearúd orm
A thuismitheoirí

Von deinem curragh aus
Wenn du makrelen fischst
Siehst du mein grab

From your curragh
While fishing for mackerel
You can see my grave

Ón gcurach agat
Agus tú ag iascach maicréal
Radharc agat ar m'uaigh

*

Nie sahen wir deinen blick
Nur die toten augen
Blieben uns (fig.1)

1

Chinese ink on Xuan paper, 50 x 70, 2016

2

Chinese ink on Xuan paper, 50 x 70, 2016

We never saw you looking at us
Only the dead eyes
Stayed with us

Ní fhacamar riamh thú is tú ag
Breathnú orainn
Súile marbha amháin
A d'fhan linn
*
Erst auf dem sterbebett erzähltest
du, mutter
Von ihr, meiner schwester
Ihren namen nanntest du nicht

Only on your deathbed, mother, you spoke
Of her, my sister
But you did not say her name

Ar leaba do bháis, a mháithrín, a lu-
aigh tú

I, mo dheirfiúr, den chéad uair
Gan a hainm a rá
*
Leben konntest du nicht
Mein Kind ohne namen
Es blieb ein stein nur am meer

You could not live
My nameless child
Nothing left but a stone by the sea

Ní raibh an bheatha i ndán duit
A leanbáin gan ainm
Níl fágtha ach cloch cois toinne

*
Kindergebeine
Eine welle zieht sie ins meer
Nieselregen (fig.2)

Children's bones
A wave pulls them out to sea -
Drizzle

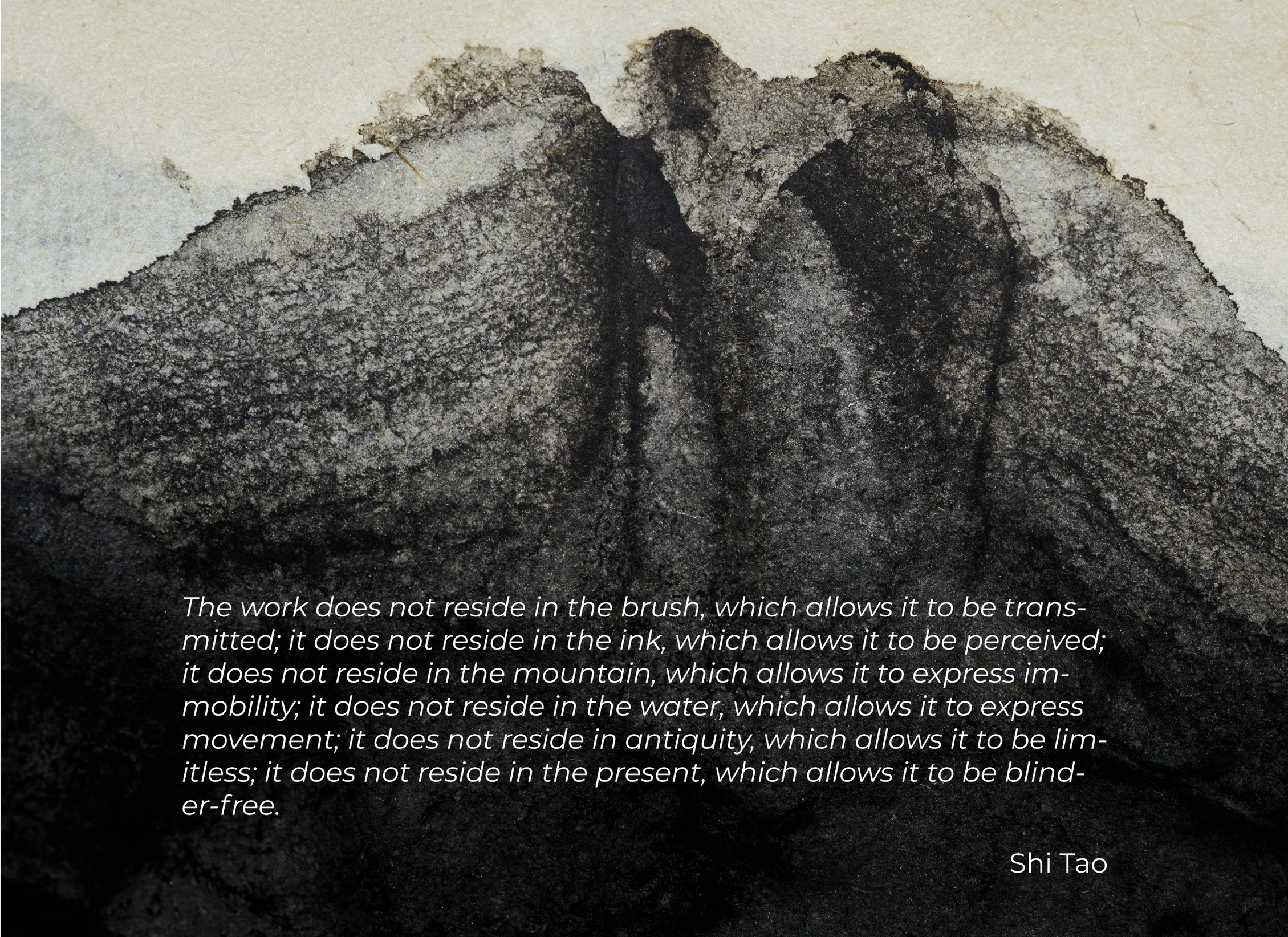
Cnámha na bpáistí
Á scuabadh chun siúil ag tonn –
Ceobhrán

*
Ich freute mich auf meinen bruder
Spielte in gedanken mit ihm
Spurlos blieb sein dasein

How I looked forward to having a brother
Played with him in my mind
No trace left of him being here

Mé ag tnúth le deartháir a bheith
agam
Ag spraoi leis i m'aigne
A bheatha gan rian

Chinese ink on Xuan-paper, 30 x 22 cm, 2016



The work does not reside in the brush, which allows it to be transmitted; it does not reside in the ink, which allows it to be perceived; it does not reside in the mountain, which allows it to express immobility; it does not reside in the water, which allows it to express movement; it does not reside in antiquity, which allows it to be limitless; it does not reside in the present, which allows it to be blinder-free.

Shi Tao

The Art of Wu Shengyuan 吳盛源 -
a Painter of the Lingnan School of Painting

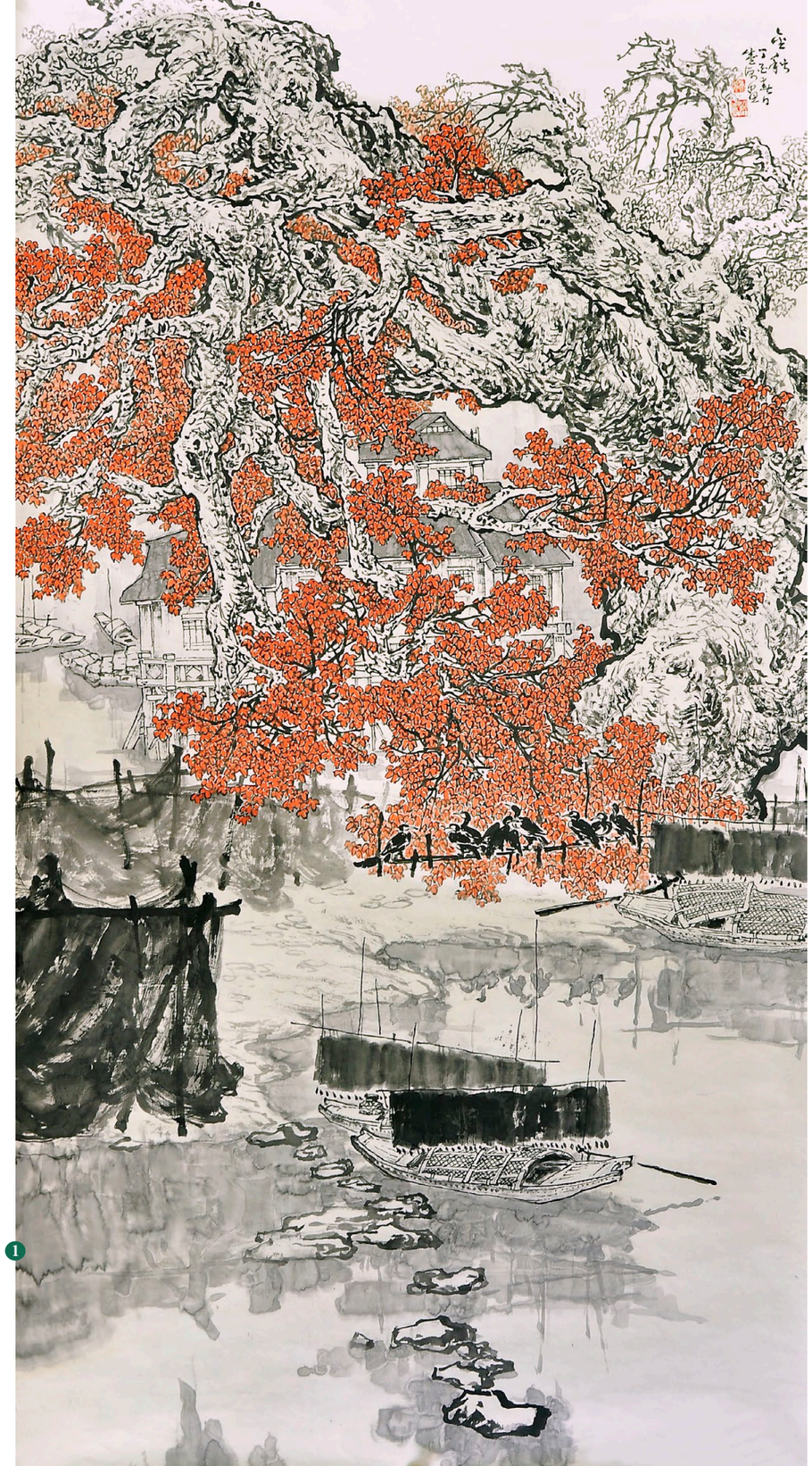
By; Wu Jiayin

The twentieth century has been an era full of possibilities in Chinese painting. The Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, founded by Liu Haisu, was established in 1912, thus turning the first page in the history of Chinese modern art education.

Due to its strategic role and position within China's policy of reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), there emerged from Guangdong a large number of talents. In terms of artistic creation, one prominent eminent has been the founding of the Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派, in the 19th century, in Guangdong Province by the Gao brothers (Gao Jianfu 高劍父 and Gao Qifeng 高奇峰) and Chen Shuren 陳樹人, also known as "the three heros of Lingnan" (*Lingnan san jie* 嶺南三傑). Heralding the revolutionary slogan of "balancing Chinese and foreign [concepts], blending ancient and modern (折衷中外，融會古今)" in the early Republican era, they confronted traditional art forms that laid emphasis on imitating the ancients. Later, the new generation of Lingnan School artists represented by Guan Shanyue 關山月 and Li Xiongcai 黎雄才 inherited the past and opened a way to the future. They actively engaged in art exploration and strove towards life, their contemporary era, and towards the people. During their years of teaching at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, they cultivated a group of artists with solid painting skills and innovative abilities.

Wu Shengyuan 吳盛源, was born in Chaoshan, in the eastern part of Guangdong Province. Although a remote place, Chaoshan cultivates and perpetuates a tradition of admiring culture and art. In the 1920s and 1930s, the transportation to the provincial capital (Guangzhou) was still inconvenient. Due to the development of the modern shipping industry, it was more practical for the Chaoshan area to contact the outside world by water. The Teochew people would go to Shanghai to conduct business, and cultural exchanges would ensue. Certain businessmen would support youths and thus offer them the opportunity to attend the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and Xinhua Academy of Fine Arts, and be instructed there by such famous artists as Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 and Liu Haisu 劉海粟. After their graduation, this group of students returned to Chaoshan as art teachers and eventually laid the foundations of the modern Lingdong painting circles. Chen Shilin 陳世霖, Wu Shengyuan's first teacher, distinguished himself as one of the most accomplished painters in his generation.

Wu Shengyuan 's first learning stage as an adolescent was conducted by a high-quality teacher, under new circumstances made possible during that period. Later, he was admitted to the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and became one of the first students to enter the Higher Academy of Fine Arts in the Lingnan area after the



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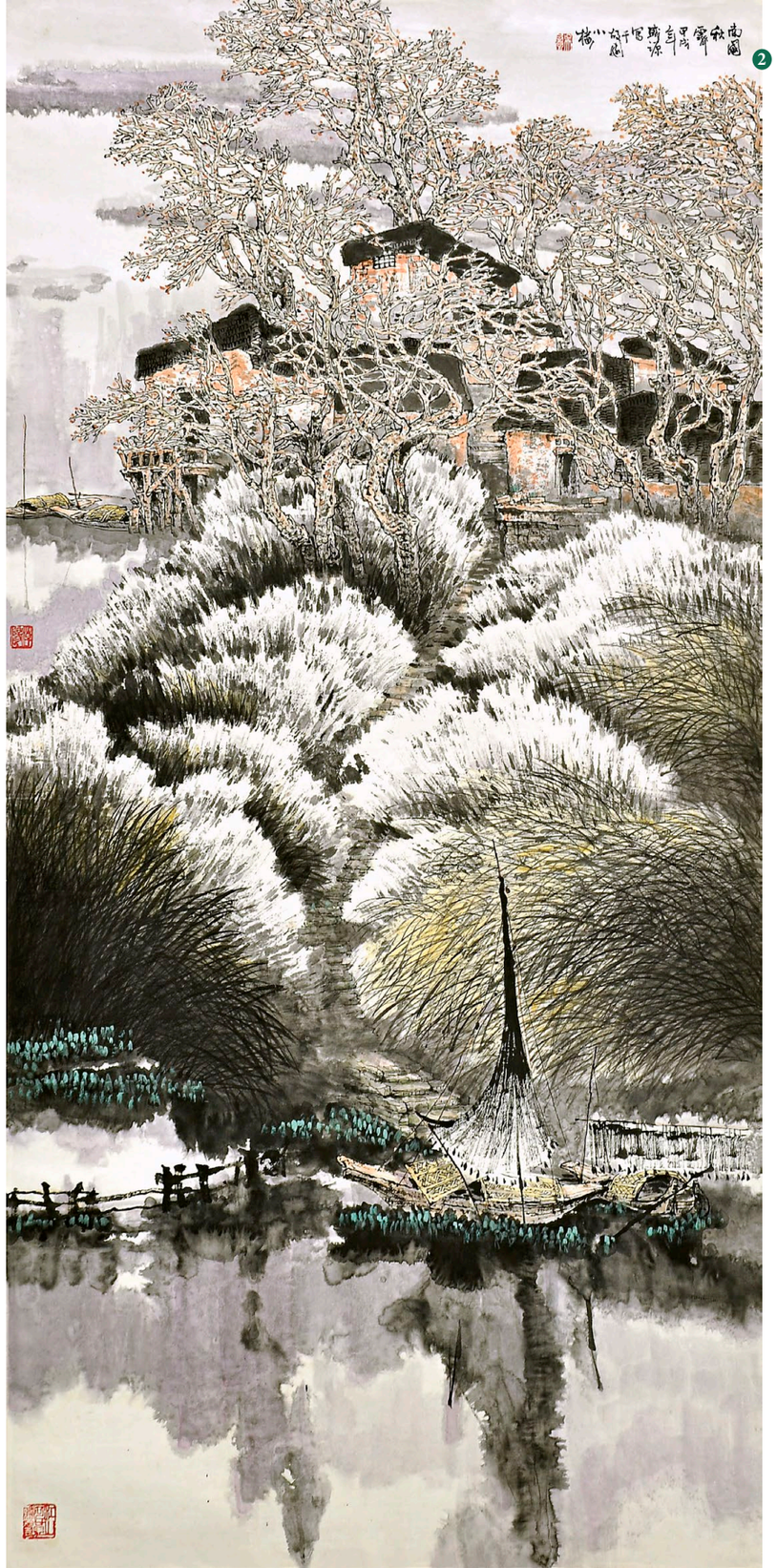

2

founding of the People's Republic of China. Basing himself on the influence of the Shanghai School, he was able to receive solid academic training and inherit the innovative spirit of the Lingnan School of Painting.

His graduation from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1965 coincided with the ten-year period of turmoils brought about by the Cultural Revolution. As a teacher, he was conscientious and tireless, and trained a large number of students. He then moved to Hong Kong for a few years, before finally returned to his hometown. In the face of the tide of the times, Wu Shengyuan tried his best to avoid external interference and tried everything possible to devote himself to painting. Guided by his sincere love and passion, he watched and drew his hometown all his life.

1 - Poetic pastorale

Wu Shengyuan was born before the founding of the New China and received an old-style education. He belonged to the last generation of people who grew up under the true traditional rural structure. This caused him to harbour the "nostalgic" feelings of the traditional literati. He thus grew up in a relatively relaxed environment, benefiting from the understanding and support of his well-informed grandmother. The cost of painting materials was not low for a farming family, but his grandparents were still willing to support him. Thanks to his family's encouragement, he was thus allowed to practice art in his free time. Roaming through the countryside, he would also and inadvertently accumulate a large amount of material that would prove precious for future artistic creations.

The deep attachment to his homeland is rooted in Wu Shengyuan's heart. In 1989, who had by then moved to Hong Kong, he returned to his hometown of Luxi 胪溪, a remote village. After his return, he created many important works such as *Golden Autumn*, *Jin Qiu* 《金秋》(140x70, 1993, fig.1), *The Homeland Scenery Ever Haunts In My Dreams*, *Guyuan Fengwu Mengchang Ying*《故园风物梦常萦》(140x70, 1994, fig.2), *Morning Mist*, *Chenwu* 《晨雾》(70x140, 1994, fig.3), etc. In these artworks, one may see what Sun Ke 孫克 has defined as "a quiet and deep flavour" obtained through the "blending of magnificent scenes and unique styles". Wu Shengyuan's later paintings gradually entered the realm of pure artistic mastery. Compared with his earlier period of freshness, later creations are more magnificent, rich, and profound.

It is this strong emotional bond between Wu Shengyuan and the homeland that we find in the paintings, i.e., not only the painted surface depicting the pastoral scenery, but also the warm, strong and profound pastoral feelings. Reading his paintings, often takes the mind to Su Shi 苏轼 's poems.

Bucolic scenes, rural households, trivial matters of everyday life, and things that most people may ignore — all are turned into poetic scenes in Wu Shengyuan's paintings. His aesthetic appeal and humanistic vision lie at the core of his art. In his eyes, labourers are beautiful, as are the mountains and rivers in his

3

native countryside. Contrarily to the people who only glance at the scenery, Wu Shengyuan has been living in the countryside for many years. Therefore, his works are endowed with a calm and lush atmosphere, the warmth of the village and the warmth of the world, and the quiet and peaceful flavour of oriental poetry.

Wu Shengyuan's paintings are both lively and playful and playable. On the one hand, this comes from his deep familiarity with the countryside, his strong sense of observation, and his profound life experience. Even such minute details as houses vary from one painting to the next. Many scenes do not rely on past experience but are directly extracted from life. On the other hand, this is also due to the vividness of the characters depicted in each work. For decades, he has been very attentive to characters. In his works, we may see the farmer in the spring, the flute player seated on the back of the cow in the summer, an autumn conversation, and the idle sitting in winter. As Wu Shengyuan's painting developed to reach its late, mature stage, the small figures animating his landscapes become fuzzy and stylised. The peaceful and quiet natural order in the painting brings a long-lost sense of peace and security which pervades the spectator and allows his heart to calm down, while he loses himself in contemplation.

It is precisely because of the painter's sincere passion and superb skills that every painting has a different feeling. The vibrant and concrete things that come from nature constitute breakthroughs in the stylisation of traditional landscape painting. Wu Shengyuan pioneered a path and created a large number of idyllic paintings of his own. These may appear as easily attainable, but does

in fact require highly attuned compositional skills.

2 - The landscape in the heart

As a landscapist, Wu Shengyuan spent most of his time painting outdoor scenes. Having received solid academic training, he devoted himself to copying and studying ancient paintings for many years even after his graduation. Guided by the innovative spirit of the Lingnan School of Painting, his painting language is very rich, both traditional and modern.

On the other hand, he traveled extensively, drawing and painting *en-plein* air. Faithful to the artistic purpose of "learning from nature", *shi zaohua* 师造化, he traveled all over the country and created a series of magnificent works that express the mountains and rivers of his motherland.

In his landscapes, one may find the dense layout of Wang Meng 王蒙, the gentleness of Tang Yin 唐寅 's brush-and-ink, and the rigorous structure and vivid momentum of Li Xiongcai 黎雄才 's stone pine trees. He not only avails himself of traditional materials, but also creatively uses ink textures. The new atmosphere and techniques have allowed him to transcend tradition. He often uses meticulous language, but can also create magnificent momentum. *Spring Brook After the Rain*, *Chun Xi Yu Hou* 《春溪雨后》(fig.4), created in 1964, was selected for the 4th National Art Exhibition. In this painting, the distant view is densely brushed, and the texture of the rocks is neatly described. The scenery in the painting's central area is precipitous and steep,

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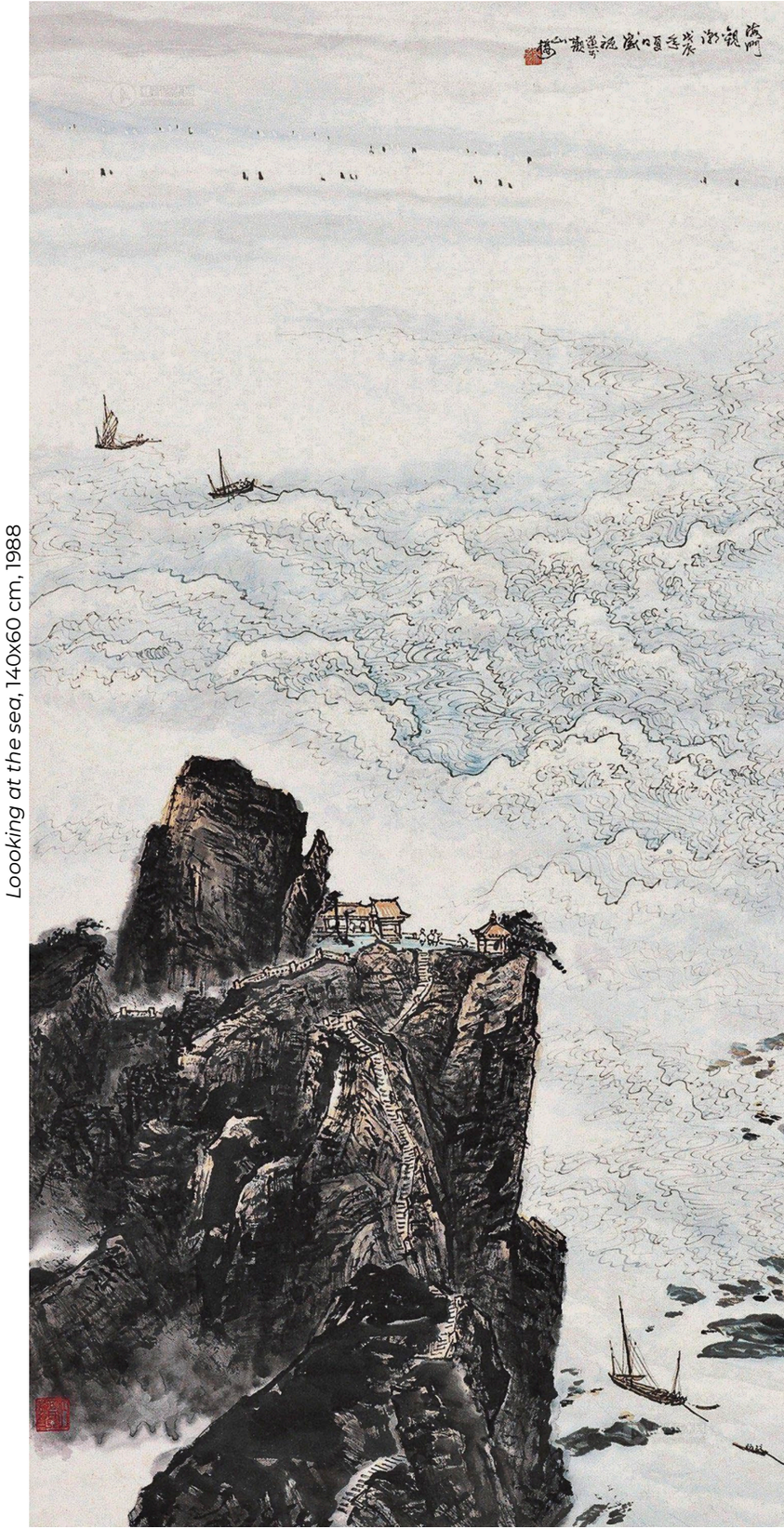
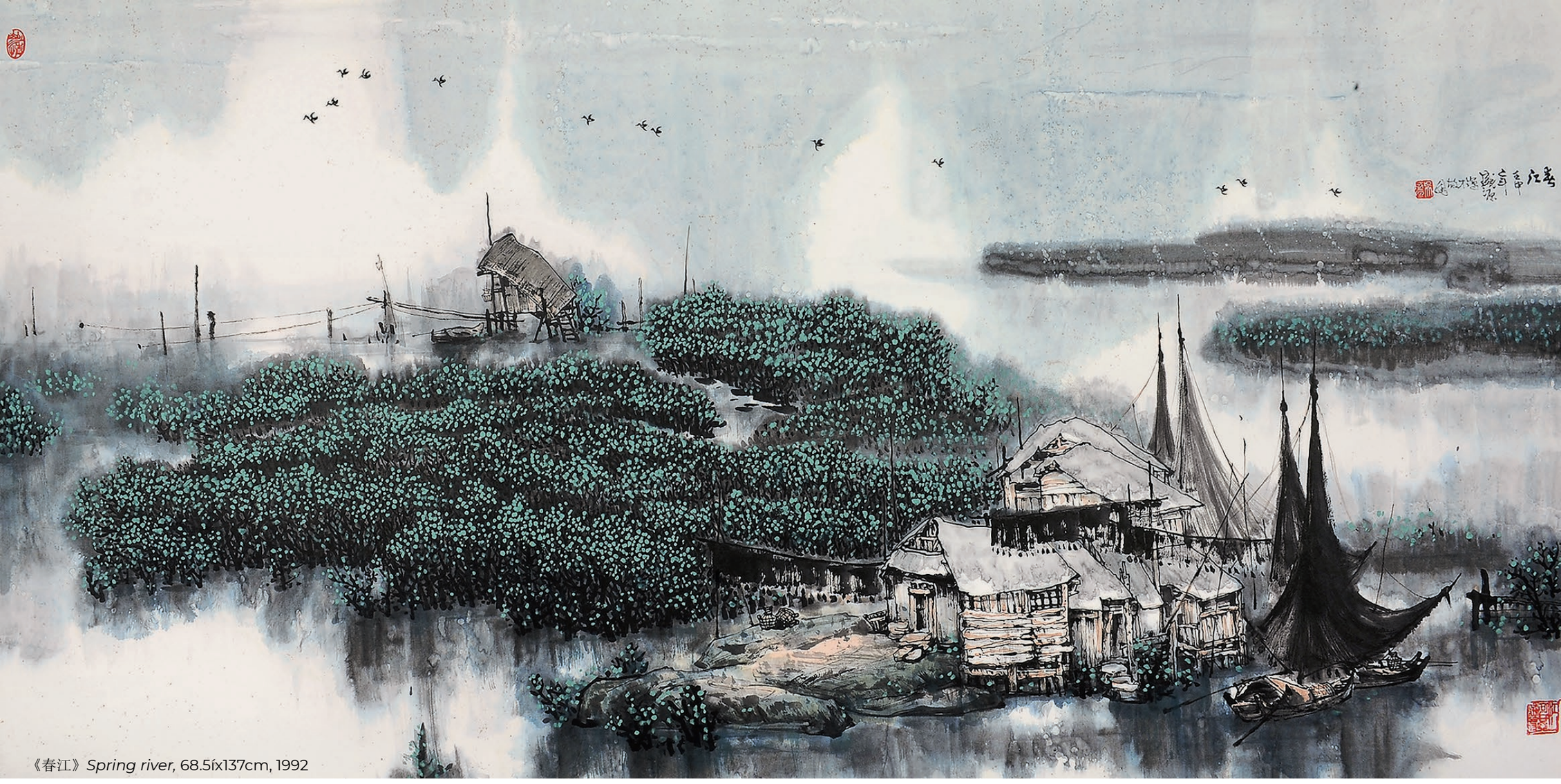
Loooking at the sea, 140x60 cm, 1988





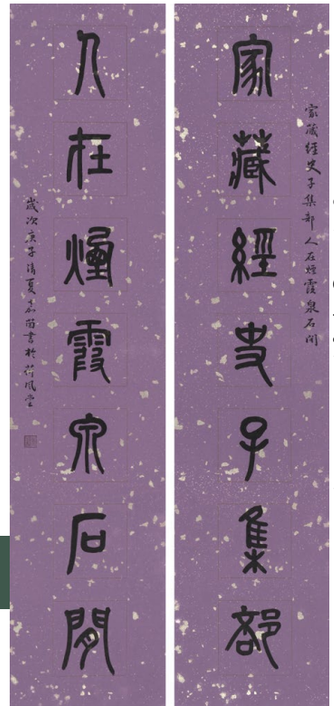
《春江》*Spring river,* 68.5íx137cm, 1992

and the labouring figures in the foreground are dynamic and beautiful, while the momentum of competition among many ships is almost palpable. Clouds and water linger and act as the picture's stabilising element. Tension, but also harmony and unity, may be felt throughout the whole work, which perfectly realises the transition between plein-air sketching and creation. Throughout the 1960s, the landscape painters actively participated in social life within the new social context. The techniques and content of traditional landscape painting were thus greatly expanded. It is obvious that traditional landscape painting was a result of its encounter with a new historical context. Wu Shengyuan emphasised the beauty of brush-and-ink, and the rhythm of his brush strokes, which was blunt and powerful. This was inseparable from his long-term emphasis on calligraphy. Apart from the large-scale landscapes, his brushstrokes can also be found in his landscape sketches. Peaks, mountains, rocks, trees, clouds, and water — the line texture is thick and spiritual. These are works crafted with ingenuity, combined with smooth ink, uncommon momentum, and vivid charm.

3 - Ingeniously inspired

"Learn from nature on the outside while finding the source in your heart"*wai shi zaohua, zhong de xinyuan* 外师造化，中得心源. Wu Shengyuan observes the external natural objects quietly, and possesses strong image memory and styling ability. The external objects are not limited to mountains, rivers and seas, but may also be as subtle as rain

《榕荫谐趣图》*Harmony* , 95 x 185 cm, 1985



Wu Jiayin, *Calligraphy* , 96x22 cmí x2,

Wu Jiayin, *Orchid and plum blossom* , 118x25 cmí x2, 118cmx64cm

Wu Jiayin 吴嘉茵, was born in Shantou city, China. She did her Masters in Art and Aesthetics (Calligraphy theory and Creative production) at Jinan University
暨南大学, and she did her PhD in Aesthetics at Sun Yat-sen University 中山大学. She co-authored and published the Volume *Research Series of Calligraphers in Guangdong History - Chen Yi*
《广东历代书家研究丛书——陈澧》, and published several papers on academic magazines, papers such us *Chinese Calligraphy* 《中国书法》, *Calligraphy Magazine* 《书法报》 and *Calligraphy Education* 《书法教育》. She was also a lecturer for a show called *The Great Chinese Characters* aired on Guangdong tv.

marks on an old wall, or the reflection of a tree, or an old photograph. At the same time, he is also good at using poetry and recombining these materials. Eclectic, accommodating and innovative — scenes that may appear ordinary in the eyes of others have a strange brilliance in his vision.
Wu Shengyuan pays great attention to the effect of ink, and he has focused on the study of ink textures and effects for a long time. He also knows that colour does not hinder ink, and ink does not hinder colour, thus bringing them to enhance each other mutually. Day after day, year after year of exploration, he has become proficient with the brush and has a rich and varied vocabulary of brush-and-ink.
Both People in the Moonlight, *Yuese Renjia* 《月色人家》(fig.5), created in 1991, and Morning Mist, *Chenwu* 《晨雾》have a sense of fantasy and loneliness. In *People in the Moonlight*, the old branches under the moonlit night appear like dragons, constructing a complicated and mysterious world. *Morning Mist* is a scene of dawn presenting a childhood realm. The winding old trees, the hazy morning mist, and the rich texture of ink create a dreamlike feeling in the morning.

Wu Shengyuan has a simple personality, is gracious to others, is easy to get along with, and has always maintained his peasant qualities. His life coincides with a historical period of consequent rapid changes and developments of Chinese society. Unheedful of the outside world, he has been like a day for decades, being an honest man, painting seriously, and experiencing the joy of painting in quiet solitude. This persistent spirit is truly admirable!

5

Yuese Renjia 《月色人家》, 70x140, 1991

Li Gonglin - *Mountain Villa Scroll.* 28.9 x 364.6 cm Palace Museum Taipei.

Concretion and Abstraction in Chinese Painting: The *Mountain Villa Scroll* by Li Gonglin

By; Thorsten Schirmer

In Chinese culture a completely independent tradition of painting exists in addition to Western painting that shows a continuous development from its earliest time to present. For more than 2000 years, laws have evolved and preserved in China, formulating a unique alternative to the painting tradition of the west. In which context does this tradition stand to the principles of the concrete and the abstract? On this occasion an attempt to shed light on both terms has to be prefixed. While concretion found a clear definition in the term "objectification", the word abstraction requires a paraphrase. The Brockhaus Encyclopedia explains abstraction as:

“Method by which specific, for the context essential characteristics are singled out to obtain general concepts and laws referring to a subject.”[1]

An attempt to explain the specific nature of the Chinese painting tradition leads us directly to the definitions of abstraction above. It is no exaggeration to say that the painting tradition of China has been fully committed to abstraction. A masterpiece has to keep the essence of the painted subject. But what is the essence in the view of the Chinese culture? Emptiness is essence, teaches us Daoism. It is the primal creative principle of all being. Here Daoism reaches hands with Buddhism, as expressed in the *Heart Sutra*:

"Form is nothing but emptiness, emptiness is nothing but form."

According to Daoism and Buddhism, the highest form of abstraction is the essence, essence is emptiness. Following this argument, it is necessary to abstract the form to the extent that the essence can be felt in it. Form and emptiness build a unit, the contrast of the concrete and the abstract dissolves in a higher level of knowledge. In fact, the Chinese painting has found its most elementary principle in the interplay of form and emptiness. Already the earliest samples of this art show us images or landscape symbols, freely composed into an empty background. On each step of its development, the interpenetration of form and emptiness increased further until the 13th century, in which the work of some Chan painters[2] reached almost totally abstract (i.e. non-representational) results. However, they never left the ground of representational painting completely.

This was made possible only after the artist and statesman Su Dongpo (1037-1101) proclaimed the final emancipation of the artist’s free spirit in painting of the 11th century. He coined the term *Xieyi* 写意 (literally: writing down an idea) as a paraphrase of expressionism, which is characterized by the reduction to a few expressive

1 Der große Brockhaus – Kompaktausgabe in 26 Bänden. Wiesbaden 1983, Book 1, p. 43

2 Chan (Jap. Zen) is a school of Mahayana Buddhism. The Chinese name "Chan" is derived from the shortened phonetic form of the Sanskrit word "Dhyana" (literally: contemplation). Chan is therefore also referred to as "meditation school". Core of Chan is the conviction of the sudden realization of enlightenment to be attained by contemplative practices or by studying paradoxical parables and aphorisms of the patriarchs and famous teachers of Chan.

lines and lavurs in a spontaneous manner of painting. *Xieyi* borrowed the free and fluid brushwork from the calligraphic concept-style.

Particularly characteristic of the conservative spirit of China is the way, in which scenic solutions of great masters of the past were used continuously over the centuries. Their technique and styles were handed down and canonized. Textbooks like the *Mustard Seed Garden*[3] were widely spread, in which the individual design elements of Chinese painting such as mountains, trees, grasses, flowers, figures, etc. were explained on the basis of classical models of the great masters. These could be summarized as set pieces and endlessly varied by subsequent generations of artists as a recipe, of course with always the same ingredients. The advantage of this typed models is their universal applicability. Human images, for example, do not meet any high expectations of an individual and correct physiognomy. It extends the traditional representation of the type, which is enough for the viewer to understand the information of the image. An abstract form, handed down from the ancient masters, automatically finds the acceptance of the artist as well as the audience. The disadvantage of this often stereotyped imitation is obvious. While it makes satisfying results in painting easy to reach even for little creative minds on the one hand, on the other hand the slavish adherence to traditional modes of representation often paralyzed the development of new styles and forms of expression.

3 This most well-known textbook on Chinese painting was published in 1670 by the Chinese artists Wang Gai and Li Liufang.

Reduction of the media to focus on the essentials is finally documented in Chinese painting by the widespread abandonment of color. While the monochrome display has been used traditionally for sketches and studies in anticipation of a colored masterpiece in the West, the exact opposite development took place in East Asia. In the 9th century, the monochrome illustration in black ink began to enforce after a long development of polychrome painting that lasted for centuries. The conviction, that the black ink not only replaces color completely but that monochrome painting ultimately attains the summit of abstraction, reflects the philosophical foundations of this art. Starting from the idea of unity of their philosophical sources, it seems quite logical to represent the world and its phenomena by a single shade.

Li Gonglin and his Mountain Villa Scroll: Concretion and Abstraction in the Art of an Outstanding Chinese Painter from the 11th Century

As we have seen, abstraction plays the leading role in Chinese painting tradition. This fact raises the question if there is any masterpiece in the history of Chinese painting to be found at all, which is dedicated to concretion. One of the view ancient masterpieces of Chinese painting, which shows a real landscape, is the *Mountain Villa Scroll* 《龙眠山庄》by Li Gonglin 李公麟 (about 1049 – 1106)[4]. He was one of the close friends of Su Dongpo and a member of his circle

4 For more details about Li Gonglin's life and his Mountain Villa Scroll see Harrist, Robert E.: Painting and Private Life in Eleventh-Century China. Mountain Villa by Li Gonglin. Princeton, 1998

1 *The Feixia Park in Shucheng has been built in honor of Li Gonglin.*

2 *Statue of Li Gonglin in the center of Tangchizhen, Shoucheng County*

3

The Longmian River near the southern border of Shucheng County.

Magpie Stream Section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence, reproduction by approval of the president and colleagues of the Harvard College, Photo: Paolo De Rocco, Centrica srl., Florence.

4

in Kaifeng. The influence of Su and his friends on the development of the Chinese painting tradition has been mentioned above. What makes Li special under a group of well educated and highly trained artist is the fact, that his fellows praised him as the best literati painter of his time. Chinese art history honors him a the founder of the *Baimiao* Style 白描, which is based on the pure ink line and makes no use of color and shows only little use of ink washes. Li Gonglin's fame has lasted from his lifetime till present. The influence of his style can be also proved in ancient Korea and Japan. He belongs to the small group of "inks sages" that build the backbone of East Asian ink painting tradition.

Born and raised in Shucheng, a town next to the Longmian Mountains in modern Luan Prefecture, Anhui Province, he passed the imperial *jinshi* exam in 1070, but instead of starting his official career in the capital Kaifeng, he preferred to live a secluded life in the Longmian Mountains for nearly 10 years. Some years later when he worked as an official in the capital Kaifeng, Li Gonglin remembered his mountain villa still very often, longing to escape from the burden of officialdom. Finally he painted a long scroll of his mountain villa and its surroundings at Longmianshan in two versions – a draft version with pure ink on paper and a final version with ink and light colors on silk[5]. This raises the question if Li Gonglin shows a concrete landscape scene in his Mountain Villa Scroll. He even wrote the names of buildings and natural sights onto the draft version of the scroll. This offers the rare - if not unique - opportunity, to examine a masterpiece from the heyday of Chinese landscape painting for its degree of concreteness and abstraction by matching it with the real landscape of Longmianshan. Thanks to my good contacts in Luan, I felt optimistic that I could realize my plan, to visit Longmianshan for a research on Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll comparing it with the real landscape. During an international conference in 2014 at the Institute for Art Science and Art Practice of Leibniz University Hannover, Germany, I gave a lecture about concretion versus abstraction in the Chinese painting tradition. Finally, Eva Koethen, head of the institute, encouraged me, to realize this project, which tries to clear the following questions:

- Does the painting really show the concrete landscape or an abstraction of it?
- What is still known about the Mountain Villa and its location?
- Are there any sights shown in the painting which can be identified?
- If they exist, what are the similarities or differences between the concrete sights and the painting?

Li Gonglin is highly praised across East Asia for his individual style as well as for the deep spirit of his paintings. The Mountain Villa Scroll is one of his most influential works. How much concrete or abstract it may offers, has been discussed since Li Gonglin's brush gave birth to it. Early admirers of the painting were so impressed by the details of the mountain sights that some of them even

5 Among others two fine versions of the draft are preserved at Palace Museum Beijing and Palace Museum Taipei, which are highly possible early copies. The final version is best preserved in an early copy which is now housed in the Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence.

praised it to be as concrete as a map of Longmianshan. Su Dongpo, a close friend of Li Gonglin, argued against those opinions in this way, that only because Li Gonglin had grasped the essence of the mountains and rivers at Longmianshan he had been able to produce such a wonderful piece of art. However, only examining the real environment could bring out the truth, but as far as we know none of these early admirers of the scroll knew the sights of Li Gonglin's mountain villa at Longmianshan. So the following report tries to answer a more than 900 years old question.

The Home of Li Gonglin: Shucheng and the Longmianshan

Today Shucheng is a small sized city with some 200.000 citizens which lays about 60 kilometers southwest of Hefei, capital of Anhui Province. In the Northern Song Dynasty Hefei was the capital of Luzhou Prefecture, to which Shucheng belonged. Shucheng was mentioned for the first time in the 11th century B.C. as Shu State. During the Northern Song Dynasty, the Family of Li Gonglin played a leading part in its upper class with the most *jinshi* holders of the town. In 2001 the Feixia Park in the old center of Shucheng has been built for honoring Li Gonglin. According to the Municipal Office of Tourism the park (Fig. 1) stands on the ground of the ancient residence of Li Gonglin's family, as mentioned through official documents from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368).

Within the park there is a memorial hall with a modern bust of Li Gonglin. Since there is no handed down image of the artist, one has resorted an ideal portrait of a song temporal

5

Magpie Stream called section of Longmian River on the northern edge of Longmianshan.

6

official. Another similar statue of Li Gonglin stands south of Shucheng in the center of Tangchizhen, a small town on the northern edge of Longmianshan (Fig. 2). The area named Longmianshan lays about 20 kilometers south of Shucheng and means the last section of the Dabieshan in the East. The Dabieshan is a mountain area in the triangle of the provinces Anhui, Hubei and Henan, about 250 kilometers long which rises up to nearly 2,000 meters above sea level. The Dabieshan is known for its rich flora and fauna, is traversed by extensive bamboo forests and is a traditional area for producing excellent teas. With its steep rocky peaks and lush valleys, it is one of the most beautiful mountain landscapes of China. Special mention deserves the Tianzhushan (1489 m) who already was considered in ancient times a sacred mountain. It is located approximately 90 kilometers southwest of Shucheng and was likely a special attraction for the devout Buddhist Li Gonglin. The Longmianshan (lit. "Sleeping Dragon Mountains" - a name that alludes to its elongated, winding form) referred to the eastern end of the mountain range on the southern border of Luan Prefecture between Shucheng County and Tongcheng County of Anqing Prefecture. On Luan side, the western part of Longmianshan rises up to 1539 meters, the eastern part next to Shucheng City rises up to 1065 meters.

For Li Gonglin it was probably and simply the closest gateway to the mountains. To choose it as the location of his mountain villa may

well have had practical reasons. The main residence of the Li family in Shucheng was still in an acceptable range. In winter it can be quite cold in the mountains. It is therefore unlikely that the estate served as an all year dwelling place. As Anyi Pan also reveals the area around the Longmianshan was a center of Chan Buddhism. Pan even talks of a separate line within the different schools of Chan that he named "Longmian-Chan".[6]

The tradition of Chan Buddhism in the Dabieshan region has a long tradition and goes back to the third patriarch of Chan, Sengcan (d. 606), who lived there for many years and died at the foot of Tianzhushan. The religious environment in his home area seems to have had a lasting influence on Li Gonglin and is documented extensively in his Mountain Villa Scroll by the names with Buddhist background, he used for his dwellings and for the natural sights of Longmianshan.

Searching for Clues at Longmianshan: The Mountain Villa Scroll and the real landscape – a comparison

My research suggests that this may have been previously not systematically carried out or documented by the Chinese side, and according to information from the local authorities it seems that I have been the first westerner visiting Longmianshan for such a reason. Facing the impermanence of Chinese wooden architecture, we cannot expect to find traces of settlement sites from Song Dynasty at Longmianshan. Quite different is the case with the landscape sights of the scroll. If some of them could be verified, it would be possible to enclose the approximate location of the buildings which Li Gonglin shows us in his painting.

In August 2015, the Foreign Affairs Office of Luan Municipal Government arranged my visit to Shucheng. I was supported by a group of guides of the local Office of Tourism and the Li Gonglin expert Song Zhefa of Shucheng. The excursion was organized and led by Zheng Shuhua from the Foreign Affairs Office Luan, who was born and raised in Shucheng. As it turned out locally, this measure proved to be indispensable, because there was neither a topographic map of Longmianshan nor even street signs or signposts. After leaving Shucheng to the south, you will reach the first foothills of Longmianshan after some miles in the form of densely wooded hilltops. Behind the small town Tangchizhen the mountains begin to gain altitude. The area where the location of the mountain villa and the sights of the scroll should have been lying covers approximately 30 square kilometers. You finally reach the southern edge of Shucheng County by an elongated valley through which a river runs northbound (Fig 3).

At the time of my visit, it had low water levels. Through further inflows the river gets wider and after leaving the mountains it finally joins the Chaohu Lake east of Shucheng. In its various sections it is called differently. At the headwaters in the mountains it is called Longmian River, while the northern section as it emerges from the mountains southwest of Shucheng is still know as Magpie

6 s. Pan, Anyi: Painting Faith. Li Gonlin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture. Leiden, 2007, Chap. 1

7 *Broad river valley upstream from the point called Magpie Stream.*

Looking down into the valley of the Longmian River.

8

9

Waterfall above the Longmian River.

Stream 鹊源. Thus, we were able to identify the first concrete sequence of the Mountain Villa Scroll (Fig. 4) that we faced by visiting this river section.

We reached the appropriate section of the river at the height of 31 ° 21 '36' 'N / 116 ° 50' 32 '' E, where a bridge crosses the river. Fig. 5 and 6 show the riverbank left (Fig. 5) and right (Fig. 6) of the bridge. The similarity of the landscape with the last sequence of the painting is somewhat vague. Li Gonglin painted the riverbank with bare rocks. In Fig. 6 overgrown rock structures can be seen. Whether the vegetation has prevailed over the centuries more or the artist wanted to emphasize the rocky terrain remains unclear. Coming from the south of the mountains, we have followed the river through a broad valley to this point. On our way we passed the river noticing much flatter riverbanks (Fig. 7), which are not as similar to the painting as the section of our spot at the bridge. In the further course towards the north we suspected no higher potential of congruence, because the landscape remains flat there. With appropriate water level this part of the river seems to be passable by boat as shown in Li Gonglin's scroll. Certainly during the artist's lifetime the term Magpie Stream might have been used for a larger section of the river in the upper course too, but the navigability even with flat boats seems to me unlikely because of the rocky riverbed. It finally seems logical that the painting ends with a sequence which is the farest from the presumed location of the mountain villa. In addition, the way from Shucheng to this section of the river is significantly shorter than to the area of the presumed site of the mountain villa. Therefore I find it easy to imagine that a river trip near the foot of Longmianshan may had been one of the popular leisure activities of Shucheng's upper class during Song Dynasty.

According to my local guides only one more topographic name from the painting still exists: the Guanyin Cliff. Unfortunately, it lays at a very inaccessible place deep in the mountains without any way or path leading towards this sight. Song Zhefa told me that he himself has made an attempt to get there. Because of the difficult terrain he did not manage to enter the cliff. After all, he even had lost the way, trying for a long time, to find a way back. The presentation of the cliff in the scroll finally appears rather inconspicuous and poses little potential for a comparison with the real landscape. However, as a fixed point for reaching the so called Jade Dragon Gorge, a visit seems worthwhile, but according to Song Zhefa it would require a helicopter to get there. Facing these descriptions and the high summer temperatures we finally gave up the idea of a new attempt to reach Guanyin Cliff. So let us

10

Opening section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence, reproduction by approval of the president and colleagues of the Harvard College, Photo: Paolo De Rocco, Centrica srl., Florence.

11

The Longmian River with buildings scattered on the mountain slopes.

Rocky riverside.

12

return to the headwaters of the river. Above the valley of Longman River there lies a restaurant below one of the summits. There I made a further localization. The coordinates of this fixed point are 31 ° 10 '40' 'N / 116 ° 52' 26 '' E. The Fig. 8 shows a view not far from this fixed point across the valley.

Approximately halfway between the valley and the mountain summit runs a waterfall downhill - the only one in significant size, I have seen on my excursion (Fig. 9). This may seem surprising, because Li Gonglin had painted numerous waterfalls in his scroll, but my local guides explained to me, that after appropriate rainfall many smaller and larger cascades arise in this area. Permanent waterfalls (like the one pictured) would thereby alter their appearance considerably. However, examining the sequences of the scroll, they could not derive any concrete parallels to existing waterfalls of this region. Li Gonglin seems to have used these elements rather for an abstraction of the real landscape and as a link between the individual scenes.

The opening sequence of the picture scroll is marked by a river course with mountains rising directly behind it (Fig. 10). This valley of Longmian River has the same topographic structure. Like the opening section of the painting, Figure 11 shows buildings scattered on the mountain slopes and Figure 12 the distinctive rock structure on the banks.

Comparing the opening section of the scroll with the concrete landscape it has to be noticed that Li Gonglin shows much more rocks covering the riverbank and the mountainside. Unfortunately, the absence of visible mountain peaks in the painting makes it impossible to compare the compete impression of the Longmian River Valley with the scroll. However, I was able to make a remarkable discovery of this river section. Figure 13 shows a semicircular rock formation at the river bank, which is composed of multiple layered rock surrounded by lush vegetation. The conformity with the Precious Blossom Cliff (宝华巖, Fig. 14) seems obvious to me. Although abstracted by Li Gonglin who shows perfectly semi-circle layers of rock, I expect to have undoubtedly identify a concrete image of the scroll within the real landscape. Whether it is exactly the Precious Blossom Cliff of the Li Gonglin scroll must be remain open, because I have seen some other more or less similar rock structures during the excursion.

Discovering the image of Precious Blossom Cliff was one of my secret wishes during the excursion, because I thought it was quite unlikely that such an unusual rock formation should be fictitious. However, similar hopes for discovering the strange image of the Peak of Accumulated Gems (宝积峰, Fig. 14) were not fulfilled. My companions neither knew the name of the peak nor identified the image with a real peak in this area by examining the scroll. As they have told me, the constellation with a correspondingly high waterfall next to the peak is not to be found in the area. Song Zhefa argued that the structure of the painted peak is rather typical for a number of peaks in the region and that those strange rocks at the mountain tops are visible only in autumn, when the leaves start to fall. This statement corresponds

12

Semi-circular rock structure at the banks of the Longmian River with clear parallels to the Mountain Villa Scroll.

with the final version of the Mountain Villa Scroll which shows some trees with red autumn leaves.

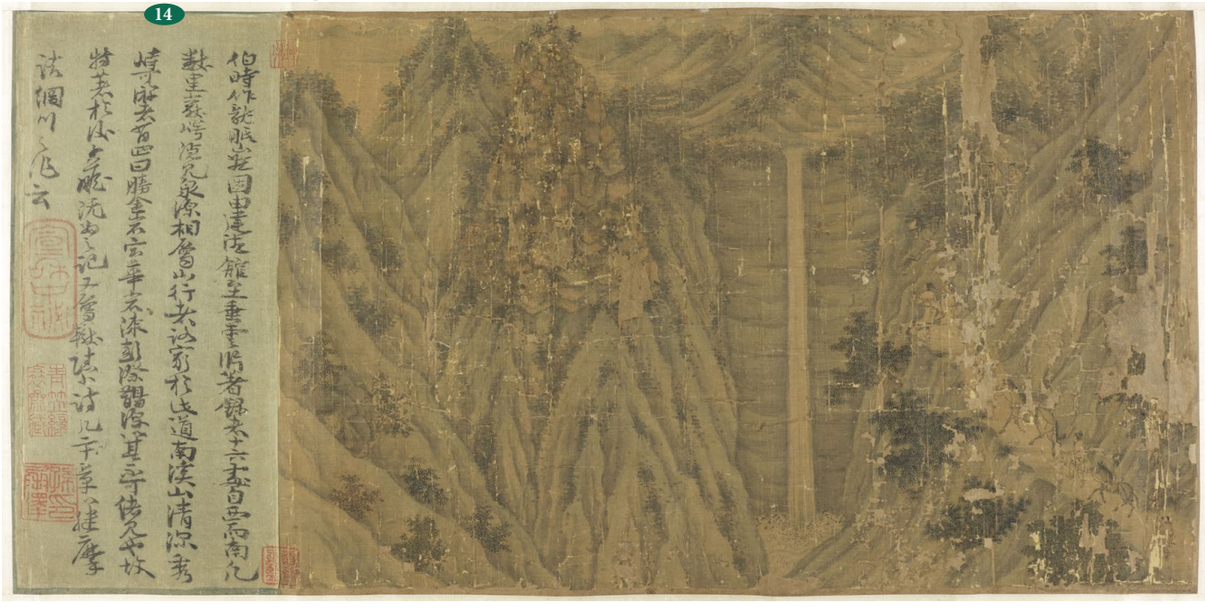
At this point, a note may be attached. Why did my local guides not notice the semi-sircular rock structure at the riverbank? It was only when I made them aware of it, that my observation was broadly welcomed. The reason for this was the widespread lack of knowledge of the group members about the scroll and its details. On the occasion of this study I have targeted all available books on Song painting and Li Gonglin in well-stocked bookshops across China without having discovered a single sequence from the Mountain Villa Scroll. Only the Internet offers images of the Taipei Scroll which is far from being complete. Song Zhefa treated the Mountain Villa Scroll in his book only briefly without publishing an image of it.

Immediately after arrival at Longmianshan I put in front of the group reproductions of the Beijing, Taipei and Florence version of the Mountain Villa Scroll, which they acknowledged with great astonishment. One of the officials of the local Office of Tourism took the opportunity to take photos of the images. A remarkable result was the fact that one of the guides who grown up in the area declared spontaneously to be able to assign one of the motives of the scroll with absolute liability of the real environment. It was the Lingling Valley section, which we visited at once. The way follows the river and then changes the direction around a mountain to reach the neighboring valley. On the way, my companions stopped in front of a cave (Fig. 15). At this point, the still narrow river which looks more like a brook runs through the cave, passing the mountain through the underground for a distance of approximately 400 meters, to come out on the other mountain side. At this point the road passes the river over a bridge. The cave lays at 31 ° 10 '49' 'N / 116 ° 53' 40 '' E. The entry of the cave is large enough for several humans.

13

Precious Blossom Cliff section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence, reproduction by approval of the president and colleagues of the Harvard College, Photo: Paolo De Rocco, Centrica srl., Florence.Mountain Villa Scroll.

Peak of Accumulated Gems section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence, reproduction by approval of the president and colleagues of the Harvard College, Photo: Paolo De Rocco, Centrica srl., Florence.



14

15

Most likely, the Cave of Extending Blossoms, today called Moyuan Cave.

Cave of Extending Blossoms, section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Palace Museum Taipei.

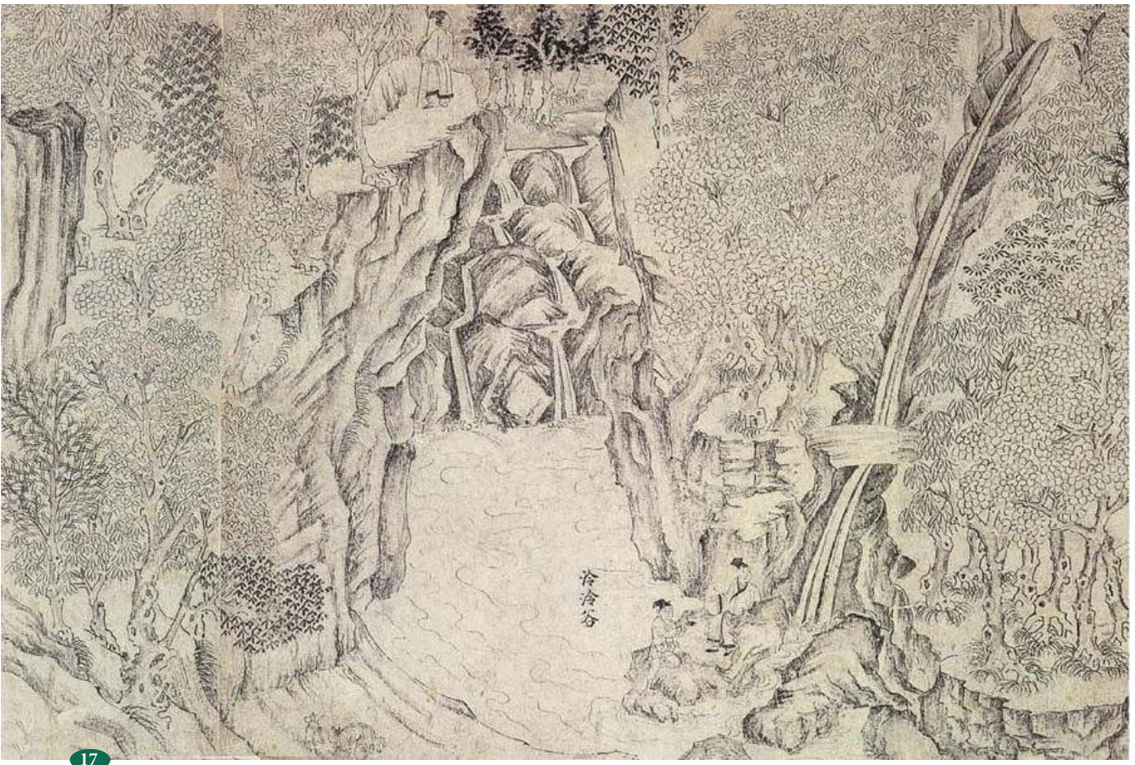
16

In the draft version of the Mountain Villa Scroll the river disappears in fact behind the Hut of Mysterious Completion. After a sequence with a steep mountain path, Li Gonglin shows the Cave of Extending Blossoms (延华洞, Fig. 16). Just like the described fixed point it is traversed by a brook. It would be extremely unlikely to accept an accidental coincidence. Again, it was only my immediate juxtaposition of the corresponding section of the painting with the real scene that surprised my guides and led to broad agreement. The present name of the cave is Moyuan 摩园. As they told me, only the entrance of the brook forms such a cave, the exit on the other mountain side is small. Slightly irritating is the fact that in the scroll Li Gonglin shows the water running out of the cave. Should his memory had become unclear in this case after years of absence from Longmianshan? Maybe it's just a trick to emphasize the composition line of the painting which shows all the cascades and brooks coming down from the mountain side running towards the viewer. My companions and I were sure to have discovered here an undoubted match, especially as this phenomenon is unique in the whole area.

We followed the watercourse further uphill, entering another neighboring valley (Fig. 19). In one of its side arms we finally reached that place, which had been identified by one of the guides as the Lingling Valley (冷冷谷, Fig. 17) of the Mountain Villa Scroll. The place is crossed by a small suspension bridge and a small pavilion stands on a rock above the riverbank. The small valley is located at 31 ° 9 '12' 'N / 116 ° 53' 5 '' E. The mountain peaks rising up not far behind the valley mark the border to Tongcheng County, Anqing Prefecture. All participants of the excursion spontaneously agreed to have undoubtedly found Lingling Valley. The chronology of the image sequences between Longmian River in the opening sequence, the Cave of Extending Blossoms and Lingling Valley finds its counterpart in the real landscape. The narrow, deep valley with the low waterfall at the end and the forest above corresponds entirely to the real landscape (today a lot of stones can be seen in front of the waterfall, lying in the river. Not long ago, they were moved to the valley by a flood during heavy rainfalls). The small waterfall on the right of the paining however, does not exist (at least permanently – maybe during heavy rain some cascades could rushing down the slope close to the entrance of the valley). In general I support the opinion of Song Zhefas that the scenes of the scroll are an abstraction of individual, not directly related places of eastern Longmianshan. Today the pace is called Longtan Valley (龙潭, fig. 18). The name from the scroll ("Lingling" which means Cold-Cold-Valley) seems quite suitable in a direct comparison of the scenery spot. The valley is protected against strong sunlight, lays deep and narrow and the cold, crystal-clear mountain water creates a sort of microclimate that is much cooler than the surroundings.

If we agree, that the fixed points of Longmian River and its section called Magpie Stream, Moyuan Cave and finally Longtan Valley are matching with the sights of the scroll, we can derive an area between 31° 9' 0'' N to 31° 11' 0'' N and between 116° 52' 0'' E

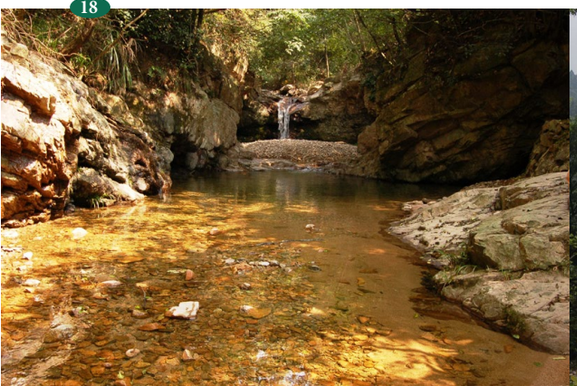
to 116° 54' 0'' E, in which Li Gonglin's mountain villa must had been located. The painting exaggerated the appearance of the terrain by a predominance of cliffs and waterfalls, which differs from reality. Li Gonglin has painted the mountain slopes much steeper and more rugged. In summary, the described impressions and discoveries of my excursion show that the Mountain Villa Scroll is based on the real environment of eastern Longmianshan, but underwent a strong abstraction under the painting brush of Li Gonglin. If Su Dongpo, who argued in this way more than 900 years ago, would had been able to take a walk through the eastern Longmianshan, he could had felt vindicated.



17 Lingling Valley, section of Li Gonglin's Mountain Villa Scroll. Palace Museum Taipei.

Most likely, the so-called Lingling Valley sight from the Mountain Villa Scroll.

18



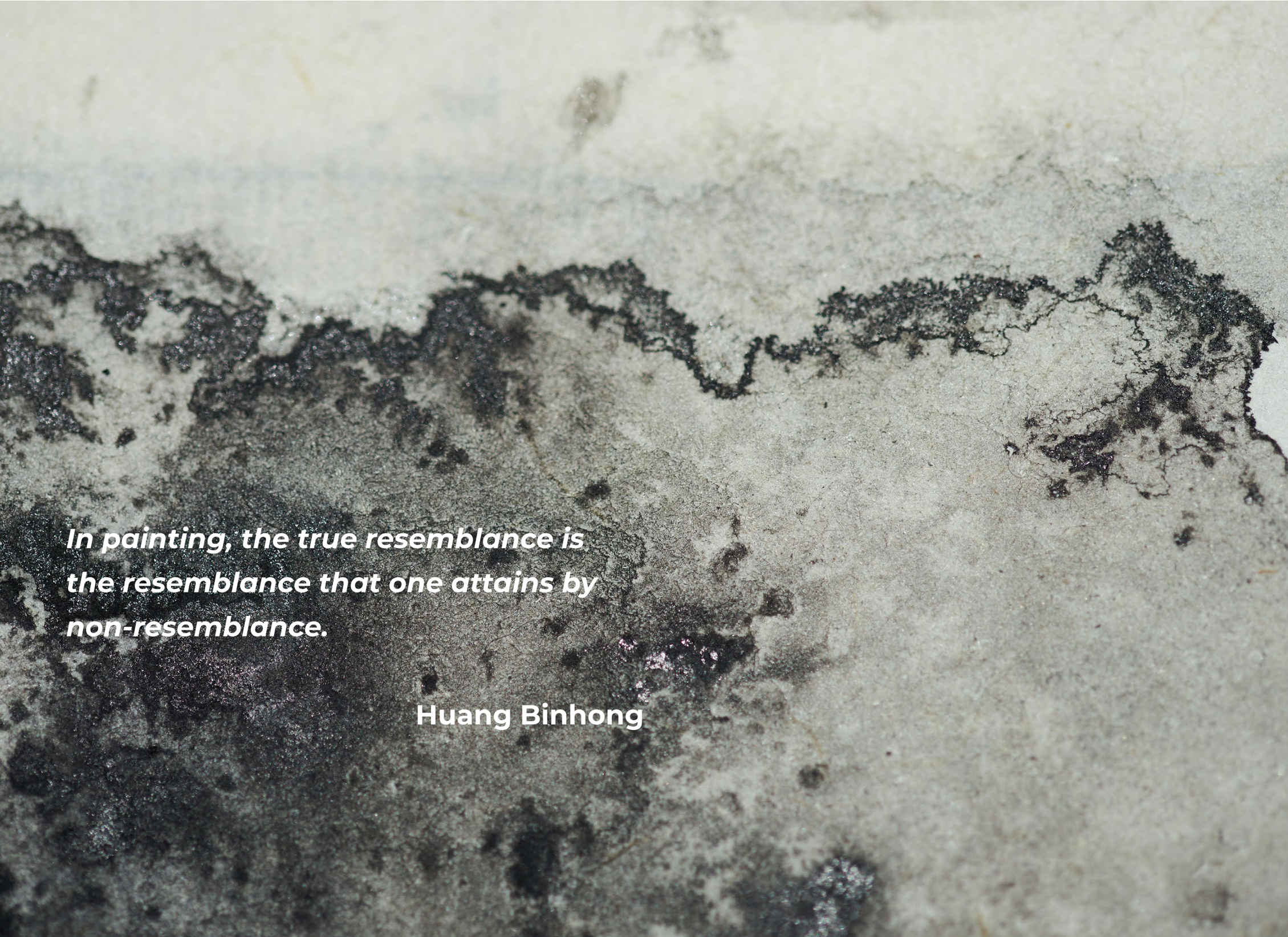
In a side arm on the left side of this mountain valley lies Longtan Valley.

19

Thorsten Schirmer, *Dao - the Way*, fingerpainting, ink on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm, 2018

Thorsten Schirmer has been working since 1984 in the style of Chan painting. Specialized in the traditional landscape subject, he designs his works only with his fingers and black ink. His turning to these ancient forms of expression and painting techniques, which are even rare to find in China, earned him a high reputation in the motherland of this art. At age 21, he was appointed as a guest teacher at the Art Department of Anhui Normal University, since 2013 he is professor at the Art College of West Anhui University. His works have been exhibited in China, the U.S. and Germany. In addition to numerous journal articles, he has written several books about the painting tradition of China, its philosophy and the cultural background. Thorsten Schirmer has organized numerous art projects with Chinese colleagues in Germany. He is a founding member of the Chinese Center Hannover and initiator of the partnership between the Region Hannover and the Chinese Luan Prefecture.

Thorsten Schirmer, *Dao - the Way*, fingerpainting, ink on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm, 2006



In painting, the true resemblance is the resemblance that one attains by non-resemblance.

Huang Binhong

《四季山水圖冊》*Mountains and Streams in the Four Seasons*
Album leaf, ink and colour on paper
21 x 31.4 Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Philosophy of Life in the Philosophy of Art in Shitao 石涛 's *Huayulu* 《画语录》

Part 2

By; Claudio D. Lucchi

Abstract

The present essay is an attempt to explore to core values of Shitao 石涛 's famous treatise on painting, the *Huayulu* 《画语录》. Beginning with an assessment of the position given to the Huayulu in the field of Western Chinese studies, and to existing translations and commentaries in particular (section 2), the present study offers a short literary appreciation of the text (section 3) before focus-ing on its philosophical nature (section 4). Through sections 5, 6, and 7, it dwells on three major as-pects developed by Shitao, namely personal identity, non-rule, and the process of transformation in art. As a conclusion, section 8 discusses the *Huayulu* 《画语录》 's significance in our present day.

5. Personal identity and the meaning of human existence

There is a powerful and direct analogy between Shitao's written views on art and his painted works, as they both reflect, complete, and perpetuate each other.

Moreover, a careful study of Daoji's life path, as seen through his extant writings, suggests the portrait of a man constantly afflicted by the question of his own identity and the meaning of his existence on this earth. According to François Cheng, Shitao suffered the "trifold loss of the father: loss of his physical father, loss of the dynasty to which he was attached, and finally, loss of his spiritual master, which he was compelled to 'forsake' when he renounced his monastic position towards the midst of his life"[1]. More examples may be found by sifting through his letters and the inscriptions he left on some of his works.

These facts may help us to better understand Shitao's evident preoccupation not only with the underlying principles of painting, but with the principles, origin, and meaning of Life itself, which he actively explored during his entire existence on this earth through the eye of painting. A meticulous reading of his treatise clearly demonstrates that Daoji's philosophy of painting is but an extension of his philosophy of life, and that both seek to explain the meaning of his own existence. One might say that Shitao tried to answer both in writing and painting Paul Gauguin's three questions "D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?" ("Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?").

In order to paint properly — that is, to create a painting animated by the same Life principles that underlie and regulate the universe —, one must first gain a deep understanding of the self and of the gifts one has received from Heaven. Shitao first introduces this point in the fourth chapter of the *Huayulu* :

"然貴乎人能尊，得其受而不尊，自棄也；得其画而不化，自縛也。"[2]

"Therefore, the most important thing for man is to know how to venerate: for he who is unable to venerate the gifts of his perceptions wastes himself in pure loss, just as he who has received the gift of painting, but neglects to recreate, is reduced to helplessness."[3]

He touches again on the same subject in Chapter XV :

"画乃人之所有，一画人所未有。夫画貴乎思，思其一則心有所著，而快所以画，則精微之入，不可測矣。"[4]

"Anyone can paint, but no one possesses the one-stroke, for the essence of painting lies in thought. Hence,

1 François Cheng. *Vide et Plein*, Les Éditions du Seuil, 1991, p. 121.

2 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 5.

3 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 97 (personal translation of the original French text).

4 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 11-12.

thought must first embrace the One so that the heart can create and rejoice; only under these conditions will painting be able to penetrate the essence of things and reach the imponderable."[5]

Shitao greatly expands his views a little further, in Chapter XVII, in which he expounds the one-stroke concept as being the common origin of Chinese painting and calligraphy (shufa 书法), a passage which may remind one of Kandinsky's remarks on the geometric point[6]:

"一画者，字画先有之根本也，字画者一画后天之經权也。能知經权而忘一画之本者，是由子孙而失其宗支也。能知古今不泯而忘其功之不在人者，亦由百物而失其天之授也。天能授人以法，不能授人以功；天能授人以画，不能授人以变。人或棄法以伐功，人或離画以务变。是天之不在于人，虽有字画，亦不傳焉。天之授人也，因其可授而授之，亦有大知而大授，小知而小授也。所以古今字画，本之天而全之人也。"[7]

"The one-brush is the root and primary origin of calligraphy and painting. Painting and calligraphy are the variable application of the one-brush. Who would remember only the application and forget the one-brush that is the origin thereof is like one who considers only the descendants whilst forgetting his ancestry. Who would know only the permanence of the ages, but would forget that the merit does not belong to men, allows himself to be drawn in the flow of things and loses the heavenly gift. Heaven invests man with the rule, but it cannot invest him with its completion; Heaven invests the man with painting, but it cannot invest it with pictorial creation. If man abandons the rule to take care only of conquering its fulfilment, if man neglects the principle of painting in order to immediately attach himself to create, then Heaven is no longer in him; and though he write and paint with all his might, his work will not hold.
Heaven gives to man to the extent in which man is able to receive; the gift is great for those who have great wisdom; the gift is mediocre for those who have mediocre wisdom. Thus, the origin of calligraphy and painting has always been heavenly, while its completion is human."[8]
As already stated above, painting according to Shitao is far from being a mere physical or even intellectual activity. Its origins do not lie in its techniques or in its history, gradually accumulated through the accomplishments of past generations of painters. The very act of painting emulates the creation of the universe and functions according to the same principles.
Hence, only a man endowed with a high level of self-cultivation, aware of the painterly gifts bestowed upon him by Heaven[9], and conscious of who he is and what Heaven has destined him to do, is able to grasp the one-stroke concept and thus become a fully accomplished painter. He does so, not through personal merit or will, but because he has come to understand the role assigned to him by Heaven within Creation. As long as he develops the talents he has received and uses them according to the principle of Life, the value of his acts will keep on increasing. If, on the other hand, he misuses the gifts bestowed upon him, not only will the fruit of his actions be worthless, but he might even end up losing what he had received in the first place.
Shitao's words come surprisingly close to those of Jesus Christ in His parable of the talents, as recounted by Matthew the Apostle (25:14-30) : talents are not given out by God at random, but to each man according to his abilities. With talents comes also the responsibility to put these to good use. For those who have honoured the burden assigned to them, there is also the promise of the increase of one's talents and duties (compare Jesus Christ's words, "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance", with Shitao's : "亦有大知而大授"). As for those who have misused their gifts, or simply refused to use them, there is the warning of punishment, which may include the loss of one's talents.

6. From rule to non-rule

Whether in Daoji's treatise or Matthew 25:14-30, a man's actions and the path he follows in life depend on his talents and on the understanding he has of them. To know one's gifts means to know oneself; to know oneself means to know the meaning and purpose of one's existence. Who knows the meaning and purpose of one's existence is not far from grasping the secret of the origin of Life and is able to regulate his actions

5 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 131 (personal translation of the original French text).
6 Wassily Kandinsky. *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, München: Verlag Albert Langen, 1926, p. 19.
7 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 12.
8 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 131 (personal translation of the original French text).
9 It may be worthwhile to note here that in Chinese, the word "talent" translates as tianfen 天分, that is, "something distributed by Heaven".

《搜尽奇峰打草稿图》 *Looking for magnificent peaks and making sketches*, 42.8x285.5

according to Life's underlying principles. He who acts in this way, and not according to artificial human conventions, is, in Shitao's words, able to "act through non-action" (*wuwei er youwei* 无为而有为). Once again, we may find an interestingly similar description offered by Jesus Christ to Nicodemus:

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8, King James Version)

To wit, those who know God intimately need not apply and stiffly stand by the rules. As both their hearts and ways are in accordance with God, they will naturally satisfy the rules and adapt to any given situation.
The same principles apply to Chinese mountains-and-waters painting, and here, there arises a new analogy, this time with a conclusion reached by Wassily Kandinsky with regard to the form used in a specific work of art:

"... das wichtigste in der Formfrage ist das, ob die Form aus der inneren Notwendigkeit gewachsen ist oder nicht."[10]

"... the most important thing in the question of form is whether the form has grown out of the inner necessity or not."[11]

Although Shitao expresses himself in quite different terms, yet the primordial role of the painter's *inner necessity* (*inneren Notwendigkeit*) is evident in the *Huayulu* :

"古之人寄興於筆墨，假道於山川，....."[12]

《庐山草堂图》 *Hermitage in Mount Lu*, 94.8 x 50 cm

"The ancients expressed their inner feelings through brush-and-ink, by the way of mountains and streams."[13]

This idea is rendered with much greater strength in Chapter VII:

"縱使笔不笔，墨不墨，画不画，自有我在。盖以运夫墨，非墨运也；操夫笔，非笔操也；脫夫胎，非胎脫也。"[14]

"At this point, even though brush, ink, painting, everything were obliterated, the Self would keep on existing by itself. For it is I who expresses myself through ink, not the ink which is expressive by itself; it is I who draws with the brush, not the brush that traces by itself. I give birth to my creation, it is not my creation who could give birth on its own."[15]

In other words, a painting is the outward expression of a painter's inner necessity. How it should be created — whether it be in terms of subject matter, composition, texture strokes, or other — depends entirely on the painter's inner disposition and needs. Such kind of creative process cannot rely on a fixed methodology, but can only be achieved through a highly developed sensibility (*shou* 受) and the constant observation (*guancha* 观察) of the universe.
This is where the enlightened painter, having honed his talents and perfected his skills, forgets all previously mastered rules and begins to paint spontaneously and naturally (*ziran* 自然).
More than a thousand years earlier, Jing Hao 荆浩 commented the painter's creative act in the following terms:

"原子勤之，可忘笔墨，而有真景"[16]

10 Wassily Kandinsky. *Über die Formfrage*, p. 23, in: Wassily Kandinsky & Max Bill. *Essays über Kunst und Künstler*, Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1973 (3. Aulf.).
11 Personal translation.
12 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》; p. 13.
13 Personal translation from the original Chinese text.
14 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》; p. 7
15 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 108 (personal translation of the original French text).
16 荆浩［著］王伯敏［标点注译］邓以蛰［校阅］.《标点注译

"... only when you reach the state of forgetting the technical matters of brush and ink, do you achieve the real landscape painting..."[17]

We may also recall a sentence by Huang Binhong, in his essay *Guo-hua zhi Minxue* 《国画之民学》:

"自然就是法。"

"Creation itself is the rule."

This does not imply that Daoji disdained the importance of rules in the painter's learning stage. As mentioned earlier in the present essay, he asserts in the first three chapters of his treatise that as soon as any given form of order or system comes into being, there necessarily ensues the establishment of given rules. However, one must first learn to distinguish between the universe's inherent rules and those that are man-made, and are thus derivates. More important than to discern between primary and secondary rules is to grasp the fundamental principles on which these rules have been made to rest. Only in this way may a painter come to transcend already established rules — that is, rules developed by earlier masters and which, over the ages, have been gradually absorbed into the traditional painting canon — and create a style truly his own. Who, in Shitao's words, does not grasp the one-stroke concept, is bound to remain enslaved to rules he does not understand and can only follow blindly.

"一画明，则障不在目而画可从心。画从心而障自远矣。"[18]

"But when one understands the one-brush, one no longer wears blinkers and the painting proceeds from the mind. When painting flows from the mind, obstacles move aside."[19]

This is why, although the painterly learning process begins with the study of classic masters and masterworks (shifa guren 师法古人), it can and must not tarry at this stage, but must swiftly move on to learning from nature itself (*shifa zaohua* 师法造化).

The conflict dividing these two concepts, as well as the dangers that afflict those who lose themselves in the blind pursuit of the ancients and their specific styles, have been addressed time and again by painters and critics throughout the ages, and represent an unavoidable topic which every generation needs to reassess. Even in the twentieth century, the great master Huang Binhong 黄宾虹 wrote to his friend Fu Lei 傅雷 :

"所謂師古人不若師造化，造化無窮，取之不盡。" [20]

"Hence the phrase that following the ancients is not the same as following nature, for the creativity inherent in nature is inexhaustible and the possibilities are endless."[21] (From a letter dated 4 June 1943.)

Daoji's conclusion, that the non-method is the perfect man's ultimate method (又曰："至人無法"，非無法也，無法而法，乃为至法。[22]) finds a strong analogy in Kandinsky's essay, *Über die Formfrage* :

"Und so genügt es, wenn man sagt: Alles ist erlaubt. Das heute Erlaubte kann doch nicht überschritten werden. Das heute Verbotene bleibt unerschütterlich stehen.
Und man sollte sich keine Grenzen stellen, da sie ohnehin gestellt sind."[23]

"And so it suffices to say: everything is allowed. What is permitted today cannot be exceeded. What is forbidden today remains unfalteringly still. And one should not set any limits, for they are set anyway."[24]

Kandinsky's context is slightly different, since he concentrates his discussion on the appropriate use of forms in painting, yet the guiding principles he proposes are akin in essence. The seemingly unlimited freedom he alludes to, is not the result of a state of pure chaos but rather due to the painter's inherent knowledge of what and how to paint — a knowledge obtained from the painter's response to the inner nature (lit., inner sound,

—— 笔法记》. 北京：人民美术出版社，1963年
17 Kiyohiko Munakata. Ching Hao's *"Pi-fa-chi": A Note on the Art of Brush,* in: Artibus Asiae. Supplementum, Vol. 31, 1974, p. 16.

18 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 4.
19 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 92 (personal translation of the original French text).

20 《黄宾虹文集 • 書信編》. 上海：上海書畫出版社，1999年，p. 202.

21 Claire Roberts. Friendship in Art, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, p. 67.
22 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 4.
23 Wassily Kandinsky, Max Bill (ed. and comm.). *Essays über Kunst und Künstler*, pp. 25-26.
24 Personal translation from the original German text.

《山水图冊》*Mountains and Streams 14.9 x 27.3 cm*

《游张公洞图》*Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto,* 45.9 x 286.4 cm

from the German, inneren Klang) of all the things that surround him. When a painter finds himself endowed with such a penetrating sensibility, he must needs cast off all previously learned rules, lest these turn into a ball and chain.

7. Transformation in art

“古者識之具也。化者識其具而弗为也。”[25]

“Antiquity is the instrument of knowledge. To transform consists in understanding this instrument without, however, becoming its servant.”[26]

Shitao explicitly refuses to worship the ancient masters and treat their art as an unattainable, lofty ideal. No one should learn from the ancients for the mere sake of it, and the past reveals its value only when it enriches the present (借古以开今). It may be worthwhile to compare Daoji’s reflections on the painter’s relation to past masters and artworks with those of Kandinsky:

“Jedes Kunstwerk ist Kind seiner Zeit, oft ist es Mutter unserer Gefühle. So bringt jede Kulturperiode eine eigene Kunst zustande, die nicht mehr wiederholt werden kann. Eine Bestrebung, vergangene Kunstprinzipien zu beleben, kann höchstens Kunstwerke zur Folge haben, die einem totgeborenen Kinde gleichen. Wir können z. B. unmöglich wie alte Griechen fühlen und innerlich leben. So können auch die Anstrengungen, z. B. in der Plastik die griechischen Prinzipien anzuwenden, nur den griechischen ähnliche Formen schaffen, wobei das Werk seelenlos bleibt für alle Zeiten.”[27]

“Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated. Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still-born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time.”[28]

It is senseless to painstakingly copy and create paintings in the manner of such ancient masters as, let us say, Ju Ran 巨然, Fan Kuan 范宽 or Wu Zhen 吴镇. When Shitao refers to the “ancients”, he does not mean all the painters of past eras but only those who had succeeded in grasping the underlying principles of all things, who had transcended all existing rules, and who, by transforming everything they had learned and absorbed, had thus come to develop their own art. As we are given to understand that the art of any of the great ancient masters is the direct result of a very personal walk of life, it becomes obvious that trying to appropriate it can only yield lifeless results.

In the third chapter of the *Huayulu*, Shitao goes even further in his reflections when he argues that the gift of painting is natural (*tianran* 天然, i.e., not human) and that he sees no obligation whatsoever in revering the ancients and mechanically copying their works. The study of past masters should only derive from a painter’s inner necessity, to wit from the inner knowledge that such an activity will allow him to obtain something new, profitable to his own artistic pursuit. Here, there transpires the implication that there is in fact no obligation to study the ancients, should one find out that such an activity would not bear positive results. On this point, Shitao seems to have been marked by seemingly conflicting ideas. At the beginning of Chapter III, he acknowledges antiquity as being the means to knowledge, but at the end of the same chapter, he makes it clear that the gift of painting itself comes from an entity superior to everything human and that, should his work resemble that of a past master, it is the latter who happens to follow him, and not the opposite (縱有时触著某家，是某家就我也，非我故为某家也。). This last bold statement should not be merely interpreted as an artistic flight of fancy. It reminds us of the atemporality of the work of art and of the fact that similar forms may reoccur in art at different intervals, without being necessarily interlinked. We may thus deduce that Shitao’s remarks on antiquity and the study of the ancients are only apparently conflicting. The man of good (*junzi* 君子) is allowed to draw nourishment from the past, inasmuch as he is able to absorb it and

25 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》；p. 4.
26 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 93 (personal translation of the original French text).
27 Wassily Kandinsky. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst, München*: Verlag R. Piper & Co., 1912, p. 3.
28 Wassily Kandinsky (tr. by Michael T.H. Sadler), *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, The Floating Press, 2008, p. 22.

put it to good use. The same principle applies to the study of the ancients. Which master should one study? And how? These are questions that the gifted and enlightened painter is able to answer intuitively, based on the knowledge of his own gifts and needs.
Transformation in art is but the natural and inevitable consequence of the painter's creative act. In Shitao's own words:

"凡事有經必有权，有法必有化。一知其經，即变其权；一知其法，即功于化。"[29]

"Anything that possesses constants must needs have variables. If there is a rule, there must be change. Based on the knowledge of the constants, one may set about modifying the variables; as long as one knows the rule, one must strive to transform."[30]

8. Towards the infinite

"L'œuvre d'art est une tentative vers l'unique, elle s'affirme comme un tout, comme un absolu, et, en même temps, elle appartient à un système de relations complexes. Elle résulte d'une activité indépendante, elle traduit une rêverie supérieure et libre, mais on voit aussi converger en elle les énergies des civilisations."[31]

"A work of art is an attempt to express something that is unique, it is an affirmation of something that is whole, complete, absolute. But it is likewise an integral part of a system o highly complex relationships. A work of art results from an altogether independent activity; it is the translation of a free and exalted dream. But flowing together within it the energies of many civilizations may be plainly discerned."[32]

Henri Focillon's words offer a quite accurate definition of Shitao's artistic ideal, as well as of the Huayulu itself. The carefully composed treatise begins at the very roots of Life, travels through the myriad elements of art (in this case, Chinese mountains-and-waters painting), and finally comes to rest where it had begun, enriched by a lifetime of reflections and meditation.
Daoji's vision and constant searching, as expressed in his treatise, may be described as twofold on more than one level. His pursuit is artistic as well as metaphysical, a journey that took him back to the very roots of art and Life, while at the same time allowing him to touch the infinite and catch a glimpse of eternity. His artistic vision proceeds from and is inextricably linked to his own existence and life experience, thus causing it to become a philosophy of life as much as of art. François Cheng correctly remarked that there exists no clear distinction between Shitao's artistic theory and practice, as these form an organic whole, completing and extending each other at will[33].

29 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》; p. 4.
30 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 93 (personal translation of the original French text).
31 Henri Focillon. *Vie des formes*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1943.
32 Henri Focillon (tr. by C. B. Hogan & G. Kubler). *The Life of Forms in Art,* New York: Zone Books, 1989.
33 François Cheng, *Vide et Plein*, p. 123.

At the end of the eighteenth chapter, Daoji himself brilliantly expressed the scope of his endeavours in a few, well-chosen sentences :

"任不在笔，则任其可傳；任不在墨，则任其可受；任不在山，则任其可静；任不在水，则任其可动；任不在古，则任其無荒；任不在今，则任其無障。…… 然则此任者，誠蒙养生活之理，以一治万，以万治一。不任于山，不任于水，不任于笔墨，不任于古今，不任于聖人。是任也，是有其資也。"[34]

"The work does not reside in the brush, which allows it to be transmitted; it does not reside in the ink, which allows it to be perceived; it does not reside in the mountain, which allows it to express immobility; it does not reside in the water, which allows it to express movement; it does not reside in antiquity, which allows it to be limitless; it does not reside in the present, which allows it to be blinder-free. [...]
In truth, the work is based on the principle of discipline and life: to master multiplicity through the One, and to master the One from multiplicity. It does not resort to mountains, water, brush, ink, ancients, moderns, or saints. This is the true work, based on its own substance.[35]

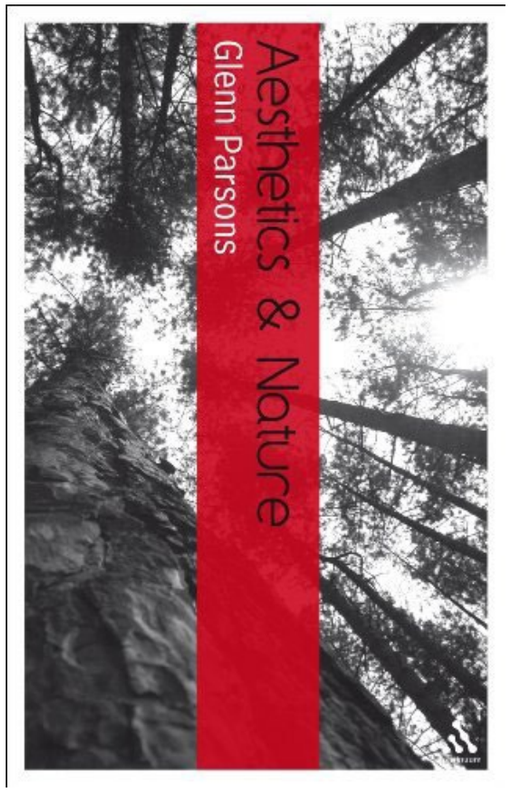
It is in the timelessness of these words that lies the value of Shitao's *Huayulu*.
Each era, each generation brings about new ways of seeing and connecting with artworks, and our own understanding of Song or Yuan dynasty paintings certainly differs from that of, let us say, viewers from the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In our day, striving to resemble Shitao in form would naturally be senseless, and Shitao himself would, no doubt, strongly disagree with such an attempt. What we can do, however, is to borrow from the philosophical essence of the *Huayulu*, and, aware of who we are, of the gifts we have been endowed with, and of the direction we should follow in this life, absorb it into our own artistic vision, and transform it — not forcibly but naturally.

《归棹画册》 *Returning Home*, Album leaf, 16.5 × 10.5 cm

34 道济［著］俞剑华［标点注释］.《石涛画语录》; p. 14.
35 Pierre Ryckmans, p. 145 (personal translation of the original French text).

《山水图册》*Mountains and Streams* 14.9 x 27.3



Interview with Glenn Parsons

By; Zuha Rasheed

Glenn Parsons is a philosopher and associate Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto. His interests include aesthetics, metaphysics and philosophy of science. His current research is in philosophical aesthetics, mainly focusing on the aesthetics of nature, design and human beings.
He is the author of various articles and books such us *Functional Beauty, The Philosophy of Design, Aesthetics and Nature.*

Z.R.
The world in which we live in, through the instantaneousness of the exchange of information, the ease of diffusion of goods and movements in general, has led to the illusion that a Wikipedia page is enough to possess any type of knowledge. Therefore, the maximum that can be achieved is a collection of a whole series of information, which in most cases, does not have any cultural substrate on which to rely on. This is especially true when dealing with other cultures which are often considered inferior to the western ones or read in a westernizing key, distorting their meanings. We do not take other cultures into consideration or believe that they have created systems of thoughts different from the western one, even though they are equally complex, such as the Chinese for instance, where a founding idea that was the basis of all thought, is the one that sees the world in a holistic key. A concept that is at the basis of the environmental aesthetics that from Yijing reaches Confucian and Daoist thoughts, and finds its main expression in the concept of balance and harmony. So could this be useful to solve the problems that afflict contemporaneity, including those related to the environment?

G.P.
That is a question that I doubt we can answer a priori: environmental problems are complex and varied, and it is probably the case that no one 'philosophical worldview' holds all the solutions. To my mind, what matters is not very high-level, abstract conceptions of the human-nature relation, but the practical ways in which different approaches manage environmental problems. That said, I think every culture can learn from the experiences of others. The Chinese intellectual tradition is unusually rich and no doubt there is much that Westerners can learn from it.

Z.R.
This holistic vision, born in the pre-imperial period, was subsequently integrated into the theory of the kind of paintings that has the natural environment as its main subject, and is commonly called Chinese landscape painting (shanshui hua or mountain and water painting) in the West, which sees the final work not as a visual representation of the environment, but as an expression of the artist's inner reality through natural inspiration. This type of emotional and intimate approach naturally requires a relationship of extreme closeness and knowledge towards nature on the part of the artist. Could this vision not somehow replace that of Scientific cognitivism? That is to appreciate nature not through scientific knowledge but rather an emotional and intimate knowledge?

G.P.
Obviously, there are many differences between the traditions of landscape painting in China and in the West. But the idea of seeing landscape in terms of the artist's inner reality and human emotion felt in response to nature has not been totally alien to the West. It is certainly prominent in Romanticism, and to an extent was perhaps present also in the earlier traditions of pastoral and Georgic landscape painting.
As for whether this approach could replace 'scientific cognitivism', I don't think it is a simple matter of choosing one or the other. Approaching nature with naturalistic understanding doesn't preclude responding to nature emotionally, nor does it rule out an intimate relationship to natural things. There is also a place for relating to nature in a purely personal way, as when we project our own moods or experiences onto nature. This has, obviously, long been fertile territory for artists. But we needn't conclude that this is the only, or the most appropriate way, to relate to natural beauty.

Z.R.
Isn't it precisely the modern scientific approach that considers nature as an object, as an instrument, as a field to be enslaved and exploited, that which takes man further and further away from nature?

G.P.
The 'modern scientific approach' is more complex than that; this de-

scription would be a caricature at best. Contemporary biology views our species as one among many: we share a common evolutionary past and a common natural environment with all other living things. So, in that sense, science could be said to have brought us much closer to nature, rather than distanced us from it. But once again, I would suggest that what matters in terms of solving environmental problems is not so much these very abstract metaphysical views, but a range of more practical, local considerations. Blaming one philosophical view for our environmental ills—whether that view comes from science, or religion, or whatever—is probably a naive analysis.

Z.R.
We see how basically in western view, man and nature are two separate elements, indeed the landscape arises precisely when this division becomes more marked, so much so that the environmental aesthetics has put aside the term landscape. Unlike in China, where mountain and water painting continues to be one of the main artistic expressions, but in this pictorial form nature is not represented as seen by the subject, but rather the painter will try to represent nature in its essence, because he does not have a position of superiority towards it, nor does he have any interest in representing his material point of view, thus cancelling the subject. Could the almost total disappearance of landscape painting in the western artistic sphere be linked to this phenomenon?

G.P.
The term 'landscape' hasn't disappeared completely in environmental aesthetics, though many philosophers would find problems with it. As for what explains the decline of landscape painting in Western art, that is a big question for Art history. Landscape painting was never a major genre in European painting, except perhaps for a short period in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century it was eclipsed, to be sure, but so were many traditional genres (the portrait, historical painting, etc). I'm not sure that this development in Western art had much to do with issues concerning the human-nature relationship. On the other hand, new forms of art did arise in the twentieth century that were, in various ways, prompted by reflection on the human-nature relationship (land art, for example).

Z.R.
Environmental aesthetics has put art aside a little, since the aesthetic experience of nature wants to be lived in nature, but unfortunately, for a whole series of reasons, this type of experience is not for everyone. This also applies to environmental problems, which despite being a common conscience, people rarely experience it directly, especially as regards to specific problems in different areas of the planet. In your opinion, in the contemporary world, can art recover an important role in putting man and nature in contact?

G.P.
Yes, I think so. Some philosophers worried that art (in particular landscape painting) provided a poor model for how we should appreciate the natural world. The worry was that we would treat nature like a gallery of paintings, admiring only the most 'well composed views', etc. This was a valid worry because something like this did take hold of the public imagination in 18th century England, during the heyday of the 'Picturesque'. But, as some philosophers have pointed out, art in general can help, as well as hinder, our appreciation of nature.

Z.R.
Western painting in recent decades has hardly kept pace with other forms of artistic expressions. Could a change of approach towards the world, thus embracing the holistic conception of the existence of the Chinese view, give new food for thought and open new avenues for creativity and more sensitivity towards environmental problems in general?

G.P.
I'm not an art critic or historian, so I can't speak to this claim about Western painting having fallen behind. In general, openness to ideas and influences from different cultures seems like a good thing for Art. But that said, I don't think that it is so easy for one culture to simply 'embrace' the conceptions and philosophies of other cultures. Chinese holism, for instance, is grounded in thousands of years of unique experience and is manifested in innumerable social contexts and practices that are particular to Chinese society. Artists in different societies have to process these influences in their own ways, with unpredictable results. But as I said, mutual exchange of ideas and influences across cultures seems like something we should certainly try to foster, in Art as in other areas as well.

Giving a voice to the great masters of the past and to the contemporary young artists

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WE STAND AGAINST A SINGLE WORLD VIEW, WHEN IN FACT THERE ARE MANY. THE ONE THAT DOES NOT SUPPORT DIVERSITY, BUT TRANSLATES THEM. ONE THAT DOES NOT MAKE THEM PARTICIPATE IN THE DEBATE WITH THEIR OWN VOICES, BUT ACCEPTS THEM ONLY AFTER A TRIAL OF METAMORPHOSIS. WE ARE AGAINST THE IMPERIALISM OF TASTES AND CUSTOMS, OF JUDGMENT, OF MEANS OF EXPRESSION, AND OF WHAT TO EXPRESS. A SITUATION WHICH INEVITABLY LEADS TO A CULTURAL FLATTENING

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